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ABSTRACT

In this collection, nine master teachers with extensive experience in small, rural Alaska schools describe classroom management techniques that have proven effective in their multigraded classrooms. Over half the document consists of one paper, the last in the volume, entitled "More like a School Family than Just a Teacher and His or Her Students: Is the One Teacher School for You?" by Lance C. Blackwood. This paper discusses: (1) the characteristics of an effective teacher in rural Alaska; (2) teacher-community relationships; (3) organization of the day and year for teaching many different grade levels and subjects; (4) cross-cultural issues; (5) questions for prospective employers in rural Alaska; and (6) advantages and disadvantages to teaching in a one-teacher school. Other papers present tips on planning lessons, scheduling each student's day and week, individualized instruction, small group instruction, student discipline, student seating arrangements, classroom environment, teacher-student relationships, teaching creative thinking skills, and teaching computer skills. (SV)

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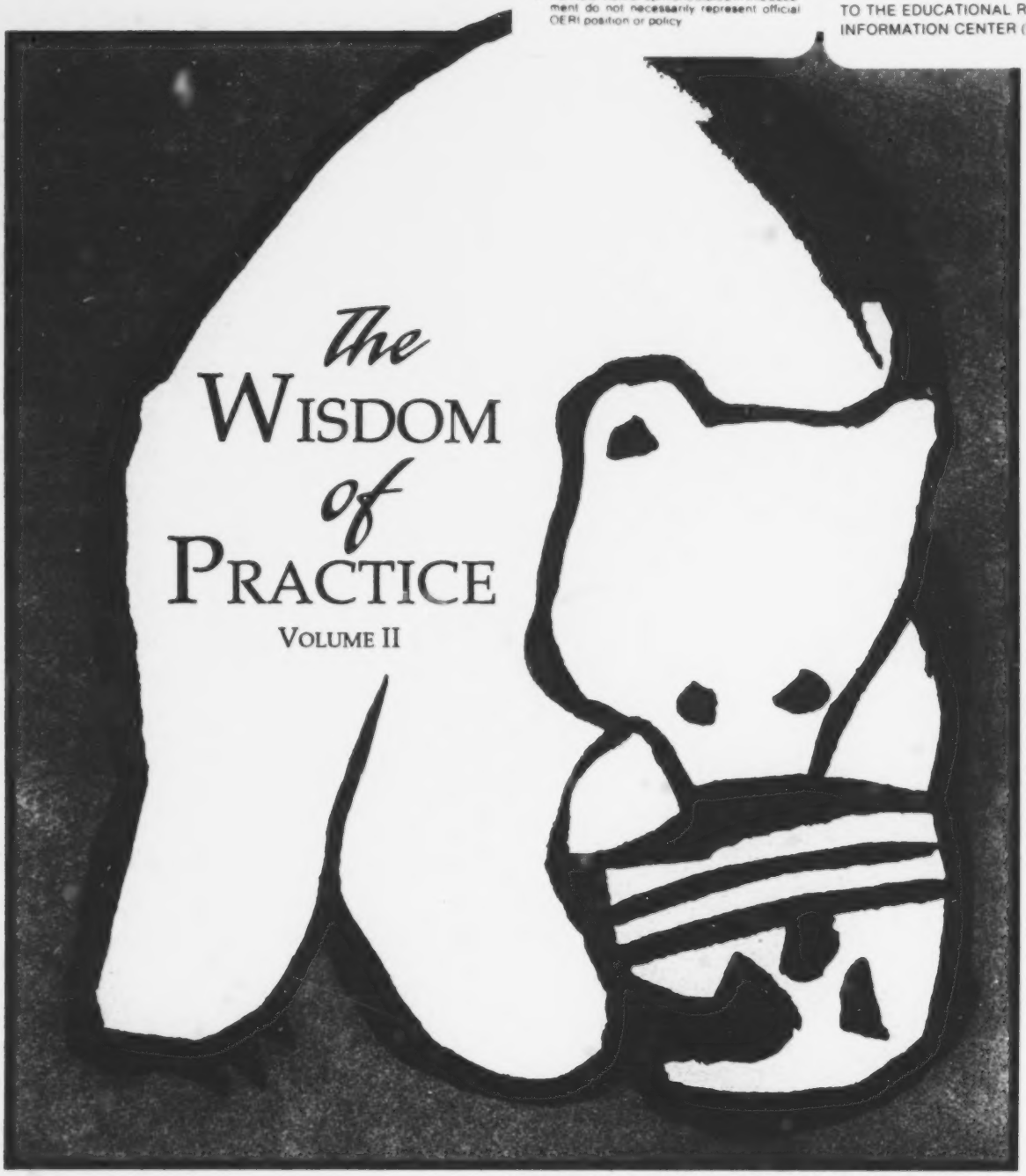

# The Wisdom of Practice

## Volume II

*Illustration by Scott O'Neal, Grade 5 • Badger Road Elementary School*

# Managing the Multigraded Classroom

2

Edited By Patricia Wolfe • J. Kelly Tonsmeire • Jean C. Findley

# The Wisdom of Practice

Volume II

## Managing the Multigraded Classroom

# THE WISDOM OF PRACTICE

Volume II

## MANAGING THE MULTIGRADED CLASSROOM

EDITED BY

Patricia Wolfe

J. Kelly Tonsmeire

Jean C. Findley

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# Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present this compilation of writing by rural Alaskan teachers. The articles contained in this publication were written by master teachers who are part of the Alaska Staff Development Network's Rural Alaska Mentor Teacher Program. The Rural Alaska Mentor Teacher Program is a collaborative effort of Sheldon Jackson College, the Alaska Department of Education, and the University of Alaska Southeast. The Mentor Teacher Program is making a successful transition to teaching in rural Alaska by establishing a collegial support team in participating schools. Support teams include a master teacher, a beginning teacher, and a site administrator.

Our thanks to the following districts who are active participants in the 1989-90 Rural Alaska Mentor Teacher Program: Kuspuk, Lake and Peninsula, Lower Yukon, North Slope, Southwest, Yukon Flats, and Yupiit.

Our thanks to students from all over Alaska for sharing the beautiful artwork that illustrates this publication.

Special thanks to the University of Alaska, Southeast, Office of Continuing Education, for their assistance in developing this publication and for hosting our Summer Mentor Teacher Institute. Most of all, I would like to thank the ECIA Chapter II, Block Grant Advisory Committee for the financial support that made this publication possible. This is the second volume in a series of publications that the Alaska Staff Development Network will produce for the ECIA Chapter II, Block Grant Advisory Committee.

Last, but certainly not least, my thanks and congratulations to the teachers whose writing appears in this publication. The Alaska Staff Development Network, a coalition of fifty school districts, the University of Alaska Anchorage, Fairbanks and Southeast, Sheldon Jackson College, NEA Alaska and the Alaska Council of School Administrators, is very pleased to use this publication to share a few of the many good things that are happening in Alaska's schools.

J. Kelly Tonsmeire, Editor

Alaska Department of Education
P.O. Box GA
Juneau, AK 99811-0544
May, 1990

# Introduction

Teaching is a mind-boggling collection of demanding tasks, decisions, activities and relationships. Teachers are called upon daily to solve a myriad of instructional, curricular, and management problems, and at the same time assume the additional roles of counselor, surrogate parent and community liaison. For the most part, teachers accomplish all of these tasks while at the same time working alone in a classroom with twenty to thirty diverse students. Larry Cuban at Stanford University has stated that "one of the paradoxes of teaching is that it is impossible; yet teachers teach!"

While teaching in the "average" single-grade or single-subject classroom is indeed complex and demanding, there is yet another teaching environment which is perhaps more difficult, teaching in the multigraded classroom. Here, added to the already diverse population of students, the classroom may contain from two to twelve grades and as many subject areas, often managed by a single teacher or by a teacher and an aide.

While multigraded classrooms containing more than a two grade combination are rather rare in most school districts in the United States, in rural Alaska, they are the norm. In these schools the requirements and skills of successfully managing groups of diverse ages, abilities, and interests, become critical for survival. Unfortunately, in most teacher education programs, little or no emphasis is placed on multigrade instruction. Teachers find that they learn how to teach in these classrooms by "doing it". However, out of the trial-and-error experiences of these teachers have evolved a wealth of knowledge about organizing, managing, and teaching in a multigraded environment.

In the Rural Alaska Mentor Teacher Project, an effort is being made to capitalize on this knowledge and find ways that it can be shared with teachers new to rural Alaskan schools. This small handbook contains a treasury of ideas that have been tried, revised, refined, and found to work in the multigraded classrooms of the teachers who have contributed to this volume. For these teachers, putting down on paper what they do that works took not only extra effort but also time out of their already overloaded schedule. We appreciate and applaud them for their willingness to share.

Pat Wolfe

April 7, 1990

# "...If You Don't Know Where You're Going, How Are You Going to Know When You Get There?"

Charles Kingsland

Sheldon Jackson College
Sitka, Alaska

## Some Thoughts

Teaching is a highly complex series of acts, which is not learned easily. Further, it cannot be done by formula or recipe. Teacher behavior can seldom be transferred unchanged from one teacher to another. A technique or approach that works for one teacher may not be effective for another. I offer the following reflections of my twelve years of teaching and administrating in rural multigraded-class classrooms for your perusal.

## *General Principles of teaching in a multigraded classroom:*

### Individualized Instruction

The small, multigrade school presents an ideal teaching situation when viewed as a unique situation for individualized instruction. The potential for imaginative teachers is unlimited. For one thing, the administration and scheduling problems inherent in a large school are largely eliminated.

An individualized approach incorporating student self-motivation and self-evaluation in the multigrade class goes a long way toward eliminating the problems of classroom management involved in trying to "teach" all of the "grades" at the same time.

An individualized program permits a student to begin working at his own instructional level and progress at his own rate without being subjected to imposed expectations based on his age or number of years in school.

It takes advantage of the students' interests and allows them to serve as the primary motivating factor for learning, rather than relying on letter grades or the threat of failure.

Individualized instruction seems to be a better method of working in a multigrade situation; it appears to meet the requirements of both the student and the teacher in the classroom. Teachers in the small school should individualize their programs as much as they feel able to.

Just as no one educational program will fit all students, no one method of individualization will fit all teachers. Once a teacher begins to explore methods of tailoring the education program to fit his/her particular situation, he/she should be able to develop from his/her experience and background, and those of the students, the type of programs best suited for those conditions.

Individualized instruction is not merely handing out materials or disseminating information and allowing the students to dabble as they see fit. Objectives, structure, and evaluation must constantly be examined and changes made to fit the existing situation.

An atmosphere of cooperation between the teacher and students is necessary. The degree of student participation in decision making will depend upon the maturity of the student, but student participation in establishing the objectives of the program and evaluating the program and his progress, is essential.

## Scheduling Considerations

Not all students will need the same amount of time for a given subject, nor do all students have to be studying in the same subject at the same time.

Because you cannot be with all students at one time, some of them will be doing independent work until you are available. One means of doing this is to have some groups of individuals review past work or prepare for new work. You can use the chalk board, tape recorder, overhead projector or student folders to let each individual know what is to done. In some cases, the work assignments for a whole week can be prepared, allowing the student to work at his/her own rate. However, this requires a great deal of time and continuous evaluation by both the student and teacher.

Some other types of self-directed activities include: art work with a purpose in the primary grades, teacher or commercially made handouts in math and reading, educational games, workbooks, programmed materials, working in small groups on projects, and using film strips.

Students, especially primary students and non-readers, must be trained to use self-directed activities effectively. They must also know what they

are to do, when, how much, and what to do when they get stuck. The sooner that materials can be corrected, or better yet, self-corrected, and reviewed with the teacher, the better.

Scheduling should assist the teacher in ensuring that a balanced amount of time is allotted for each subject and that none is overlooked. However, it should not become so rigid that it prevents an unplanned event from becoming the source of a learning situation. Some moments just occur, and in most cases student interest should be capitalized upon, not cut off to meet a schedule.

## Grouping

Teachers can organize their classrooms into small groups for various tasks by moving the desks or chairs. Students often like to sit on the floor for some tasks, even at the high school level. Students working together in twos and threes or in a variety of arrangements is much more natural than rigid rows of desks facing the front of the room. Informal circles, rectangles or groups provide for a greater degree of student involvement, allowing students to learn from each other in addition to learning from a specialist.

Class work conducted from a circular seating arrangement, whether it is a math, social studies or English class, produces a much more efficient setting for class interactions. Students need not turn around to communicate with each other and anyone in the group can see the faces of all the group. The teacher can become a member of the group or stay outside the group depending on the situation.

Seating arrangements should be flexible and changed frequently to meet the needs of the situation. When students know they can make their own seating arrangements, rapport among students and between students and teacher can greatly improve. This also creates a climate conducive to self discipline rather than teacher-imposed discipline.

Self discipline evolves over a period of time and students should be given planned opportunities to organize themselves around their intellectual campfires so that interaction, learning and maturation can take place.

Any seating arrangement which meets the needs of the students in a particular activity should be used. If a quiet planning session is needed by some students, chairs should be moved to a corner by that group without needing permission from the teacher. If one group is having organizational difficulties, they should be free to ask others to join their group, or leave to join other groups.

Only by freedom in grouping and seating can natural group and individual interactions take place in a classroom. The processes whereby students learn to relate to others may be the most valid part of the learning situation for that day.

In conclusion, the importance of unstructured seating arrangements to any school program should not be minimized. The attitude of the class

toward the teacher and of the teacher towards the class can be initially set by structured or unstructured seating arrangements.

### Room Environment

The too neat, too clean, too orderly classroom is not conducive to a relaxed, informal exploratory and inquiring atmosphere, just as a teacher with a too structured, too limited and too narrow a personality is not conducive to an open attitude of inquiry and discovery in the classroom.

Students should be encouraged to bring materials, demonstrate hobbies, build things, experiment, etc. as much as possible. The more involved a student becomes, the more he will learn. All materials should be easily accessible and easily stored; geared to student use.

Activity centers should be created around the current interests of the students. There should be a place in the room where students can continue science experiments, work on mathematics, construction or measuring problems, prepare social studies dioramas, models and maps, etc.

Students should be allowed to make a mess and to use messy materials. Excessive concern about "how the room looks" prevents many exciting activities from taking place.

A reasonable amount of cleaning up should be considered a part of the students' responsibility for the project. However, cleaning up to the extent that projects are stopped should not occur. A continuing project should be allowed to continue without constant stopping to put away materials one day only to get them out again the following day.

Classes on operation of all AV equipment should be a basic part of classroom techniques. Students gain confidence by operating machines for their peers and instructing them in its use. Let a student be the demonstrator.

### Teacher Talk

The lecture method of teaching deprives students of a meaningful relationship with the teacher in a learning situation. Mutually exploring and discussing ideas and concepts as a class, in groups and as individuals, personally involves each student in the learning situation.

As the teacher works with each child when he needs assistance, or as he reports progress, the value of this type of teaching on a one-to-one basis becomes evident. Questions are asked and answered by both teacher and student on a basis of mutual sharing of knowledge, rather than as a teacher checking a student's ability.

It is very difficult for teachers to realize that often students learn more effectively when the teacher does not talk. If each student can find some way to attack a problem, that in itself is learning; the next time he will probably go another step toward the solution. Other students can often find ways to communicate ideas and give probable solutions to their

peers far more effectively than can a teacher, far removed from the students' relevancy sphere.

The teacher should move casually around the room, giving help only if another student cannot, sitting down and joining a group to discuss the problem, then moving on to talk to others.

Students request individual conferences when they feel they are ready to report their progress. A few questions and discussion will readily reveal readiness to move on, or the necessity for more work to develop the understandings needed.

## Wrap Up

Sprinkle the following one liners over the previous five general principles:

> The student, rather than content, is the vehicle for the learning process,
>
> The written word has to be adapted to fit reading levels, interests and/or needs,
>
> Accountability and responsibility must be encouraged to maintain standards,
>
> Correlation of subject matter, not fragmentation and isolation,
>
> Use of local and/or current events as a basis for building concepts.

In summary, teaching is fun and rewarding in a multigraded classroom when the emphasis is placed on learning.

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# Organizing a Multigraded Classroom

Deanna Cole

George Willis School
Red Devil, Alaska

Over the years, my husband, Max, and I have taught in several Alaskan villages (Noatak, Kwethluk, Aniak, Kongiganak, Stony River) in various classroom combinations in K-8 or K-12 schools. We've taken turns being Principal/Teacher, and currently live in Red Devil, a small village on the Kuskokwim River. I am the teacher for seventeen first through twelfth graders in Red Devil, and Max is Principal for three upriver villages.

Managing a multigraded classroom in any setting takes patience, flexibility, creativity, and stamina in order to provide continuity and generate the excitement necessary for success. It doesn't take much imagination to know that seventeen assorted students generate their own brand of excitement. Classroom management determines order, progress, and sanity!

The point needs to be made that what works in one instance may not work in another. Rural villages are unique, and students so diverse—even within one village—that you must be able to innovate, adapt, and revise as you go along. Rules and procedures have a way of evolving so that what you end up with at the end of the year may be far removed from how you began.

One device we've used successfully over the years in every village and combination of classes is an **individual assignment sheet**. An assignment sheet is simply a detailed plan which is custom-made on a weekly basis for each student in your class. We have used them successfully at every level from grades 1-12. We simplify the format for the elementary students.

Here is a sample assignment sheet as it might look at the end of the week.

*On a completed lesson sheet, I circle comments in red ink so I can have reference on daily progress and at student/parent conferences, and to keep a record of grades. The advantages of using such a sheet far outweigh the disadvantages, as you can see from the lists below.

## *Assignment sheets*

**Advantages**

- students can learn to plan their own sheets
- can individualize work, pace
- holds kids accountable for work
- unobtrusively "beef up" assignments as needed
- holds kids accountable for work
- students always know where they should be, in body and spirit
- includes due dates for projects
- keeps kids' time lined out—much less "down time"
- streamlines movement of kids
- small group discussion/projects
- whole class discussion/projects
- cooperative learning groups
- work in centers (CAI, desktop publishing, research)
- housekeeping tasks (answer phone, straighten centers)
- multi-purpose management tool
- lesson plans
- progress records for the next year
- grades
- student/parent conferences
- reteaching important concepts
- can be cross-referenced with class incentive charts
- provides up to date records for eligibility purposes
- students can give feedback to you on the sheets
- provides students a record of what they have done
- format is versatile so any teacher can adapt it to their purposes

**Disadvantages**

- takes 30-60 minutes per student to plan a week

Name: KAYMBRA
Week: # 1 Date: Aug 21-25

"If it is to be .... it's up to me!"

| Subject/Time | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Grd. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Math 9:00 - 9:55 | "Sponge" Intro text #1 -10 -0 | #2 -11 -0 | #3 -4 -0 | #4 -9 -0 | # 5 -5 -0 | Synonym out |
| Biology 9:55 - 10:50 | Prewrite Intro text ✓ CH. 1 in teams Report back... | CH1 STUDY SHEETS GRPS OF 3 Hand in today CH 2 10 | CONT.. CH 2 READ IN GRPS DEMO COMP DISKS | Review ch 1/2 CH 2 STUDY SHEETS fastwrite | Review 10 min CH 1 • 2 TEST score • discuss 89 | 94.7 A |
| English 11:05 - 12:00 | Preview 9 wks Newsletter Journal Reading Speaking | Text: Chap on Manuscript Form ✓ Brainstorm news sessions - 2 grps | cont.. Brainstorm Assign + write rough draft | Response grps writing process Text ch 13 or 14 for ref | Rewrite onto computer ✓ graphics demo Pagemaker | A |
| Lunch | | | | | | |
| Alaska Studies 12:30 - 1:25 | Explain materials ✓ Unit I | Select a project for ✓ Unit I Project # 5 | "Listen" to tape p. 1-4 ✓ class activity | Do computer Lesson 1 • 2 ✓ work on personal profile for Sister School Application | ✓ | A- |
| Health 1:25 - 2:20 | Role play" p 47 Needs, Wants, Principles, Goals ✓ Journal entry | Review p. 4-7 ✓ Match vocab self portrait collage | (Read p 8-11) ✓ Personal Inventory Finish collage | Match vocab Grp activity 100 | Quiz over vocabulary Ch 1 • 2 100 | A- |
| Voc.Ed. 2:35 - 3:30 | Exp. district Voc Ed. Program VICA | Journal entry Mac SE DEMO STUDY HALL → | Journal entry → Mac Plus DEMO | 2GS DEMO | Intro Battle of Books Prog. → | A- |

## How I Use Assignment Sheets

In addition to the advantages listed above, assignment sheets permit me to use a variety of teaching methods and strategies which accommodate the different learning styles and moods of my students. With cooperative learning and peer tutoring strategies, I can simultaneously use text assignments, centers, small group work and individual conferences. Assignment sheets also permit me to effectively use and track which research-based programs and strategies work in my multigrade classroom. It helps me keep a balance because I can see where I have been, and where I need to go.

On the first day of school, each student receives a partially completed assignment sheet. I include procedures for handing in daily work, homework, and break times. Processes for long-range programs which students will use throughout the entire year, (such as Battle of the Books, Writing Project, Future Problem Solving, computers and video) are plotted on the first assignment sheet. Once the students are aware of the processes they will be expected to use, they recognize them later as the steps are presented in more depth. Student awareness builds until students are using the processes across the curriculum, alone or in group settings. As the first week progresses, we fill in the sheet together, until the entire week is planned. I explain some of the advantages listed above, and let students know they are free to respond on their sheets, and that possibly at a later date they will make out their own sheets.

Each student has a personal copy of the sheet, which they hinge to the top of their desk with tape so they can find it easily for reference. When they don't need it, it flops down to the side of their desk. I put one sheet in the file for safe-keeping (students will occasionally lose their sheet), and I keep a master set of the sheets on my desktop, for easy reference and for a running record of the students' progress and grades on daily work. As they do the work planned on the sheet, they also master the use of the sheet itself. More importantly, they learn "how to learn" on their own.

It helps students see the relationship of their weekly sheets to the entire year if you have a semester or yearly calendar with special programs plotted on it. For example, if your district participates in Battle of the Books, students can see that they need to read on a regular basis if they want to be competitive for district and state battles. Then when they see the program on the assignment sheet, it is more meaningful to them. They see the big picture.

I try to start sheets for the following week on Thursdays after school. I continue to plug in whole language activities, cooperative learning time, group projects (video production), computer time, use of centers, and special programs as they come up during the course of the year. Some of these programs are short, one-time units; others are on-going for the biggest part of the school year. Sheets also include textbook readings and assignments. It takes about three weeks for students to get the hang of using the sheets effectively. Perhaps the most important things to be said about sheets are the comments of the students who use them:

"You don't need the teacher to know where you should be."

"I like to see the whole week at a time."

"You learn how to pace yourself."

"I never knew I could do so much work."

"I like to check off the work I did."

"You can just go on when you get done. You don't have to wait."

"They make it easy to find what to do next 'cause they're organized."

"I don't waste my time waiting."

"No one worries about what the other kids are doing, like if they have less work or more work."

For more information, call (907) 447-3213 or write:

Deanna Cole
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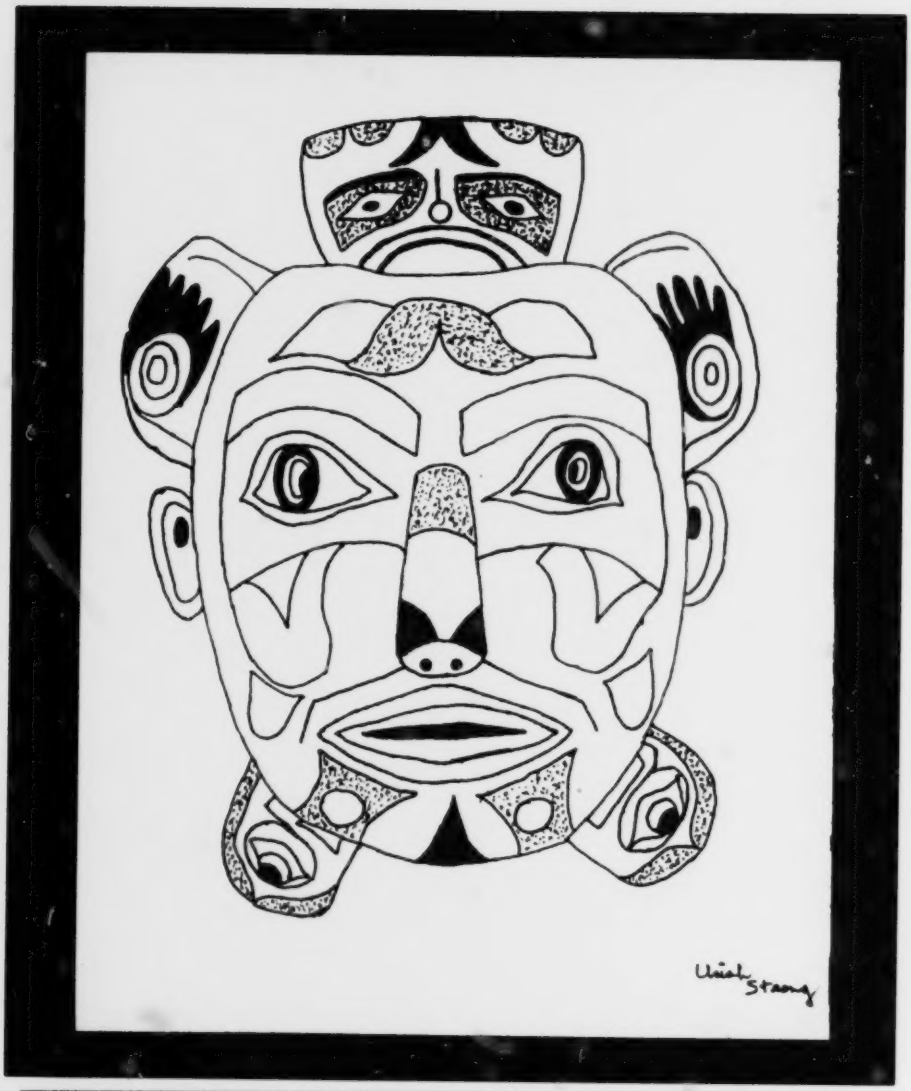
Red Devil, Alaska 99656



# Thoughts on Being a First Year Teacher in a Bush Village

Jennifer Cizek

Cully School
Point Lay, Alaska

My first thought was "Help! I am responsible for all grades 1-6!" I had no idea where to begin. How was I going to handle such a wide range of abilities? Here is what I did:

### Organizing Subjects

I divided the morning up into different ability-level reading groups and math groups that I call sessions. While they are in session they have my undivided attention. Those who aren't in session know that they are to ask any questions they may have amongst themselves before they interrupt me. On the board, I list the seat work assignments for the day. The assignments usually are homework, cursive writing, journal and a daily writing topic. After they finish their seat work they are allowed to go to the computer, listening center, or find a book to read. They usually do not have much time left over after their seat work is done (10-20 minutes at the most). The first graders start the day with their journal; usually they draw a picture and write a word or two to go with it. Then they have a session with me. At the end of the session, I give them a practice sheet with five words that I choose from their reading book. When they are done, they go to another center until math time. The morning consists of equal time slots in which reading and math is taught. In the afternoon, I have the remaining subjects. All of these subjects are taught to the whole class with special help given to the first graders, who are just beginning to read. Any exams they take are oral. Extra help is needed for the first graders in P.E. and art and the older students are usually good at helping them.

### Classroom Management

One thing I quickly found out was that any form of peer pressure did not work for maintaining order. I tried everything including Assertive Discipline but nothing worked until I started using "Funny Money". The money is fake, of course, and it is laminated so that it lasts longer. The students have to make $5 a day to be able to participate in the party on

Friday afternoon. They are required to keep a money ledger so they can record their transactions. This also eliminates the temptation to steal money from someone else. When the students are in reading session, I give them a dollar every time they are called on to read and they know exactly where to start. If they don't know know, they don't get the dollar. They get a dollar after their language and math sessions and they get a dollar if they can walk down the hallway and back without talking or touching anyone.

Another thing I put on the board every day is something I call a "mind bender". It can be anything from a riddle to a crazy question, as long as it's a question that is a little out of the ordinary and makes them think. I also give a dollar to the person who solves the "mind bender".

To keep track of who is in the bathroom, I write two columns on the board, one for boys and one for girls. When they go to the bathroom, they do not have to ask, they just need to write their name in the correct column. When they return, they draw a line through their name. I allow them to go to the bathroom once in the morning and once in the afternoon. In case of an emergency, they have to pay me a dollar before they can go. You know they are only going to pay if they they really have to go. The names are left on the board so that I can see who is gone and so that I can see that only one student is gone at a time.

There are many times during the day in which the students can earn money. The only time I take money away is if they are misbehaving, not working, not listening to me, hitting or calling names. I always give a warning before I take any money away.

On Friday they have to make sure their ledger is in order. I will only count the money that is accounted for on their ledger. At this time I will give them a dollar for perfect attendance with no tardies, a clean desk, and a clean cubby. They get to vote on what they would like to do to celebrate on Friday. If they have any money left over they can "buy" something from the goodie box for $5. They have to hand in all their money at the end of the week and start from zero on Monday. Those who can't "afford" the party have to do work instead but they can spend the money they've accumulated to buy something from the goodie box.

"Funny Money" is good for learning how to handle money and the ledger is similar to writing in a checkbook.

### Helper of the Day

On the board is a list of all the students and the order never changes unless someone moves away. The list is used for the "Helper of the Day". They like being the helper and keep a close eye on whose turn it is in the event I should forget. The helper gets to put the date on the calendar, turn the lights off and on, be exercise leader in P.E. and be the gofer for any errands I may need done.

### Journals

Every day the students write in a journal. I make the journal every month by folding a piece of construction paper in half the short way and stapling or taping a cover picture on the top, a blank calendar on the inside cover. I also staple writing paper to the inside. Students have to fill in the calendar and write the date down before they write their entry for the day. When they are finished, they come up to me in session. They wait until they get my attention and then they hold up their journal for me to look at. If they have written more than 3 or 4 sentences, I nod my head "yes" and they move on to their other seat work. If it's not long enough, I nod "no" and they try again. The reason I have them write in a journal is I want them to have a chance to write without fear of being graded. I don't grade the journals for content but I do grade them for effort. I don't consider writing one sentence as a lot of effort so I have them show it to me every day so that I don't have to give them a bad effort grade.

### Teacher's Books

When you teach a lot of grade levels, you get a lot of teacher edition books. What I have found useful is a file cabinet and hanging Spendiflex folders. The cabinet is placed right next to my session table for easy access. I label the folders by grade level and subject. I copy upcoming tests and place them in the textbook in the appropriate place. This system keeps all the books in one place, close at hand, and easy to find for a substitute.

### Lack of Resources

In rural schools you may lack resources such as books, movies, filmstrips, video tapes, etc. They are available through a central location but take a lot of previous planning and organization to get them on time. I would suggest bringing with you as many educational materials as possible. Science experiments or other activities requiring a trip to a store for odds and ends aren't feasible in a rural school. It can be too costly to buy the materials yourself if the School doesn't already have what you need.

### Things to Consider for Living in a Rural Artic Village

- Groceries
- Mail and Mail Schedules
- Long periods of darkness
- Liquor problems/parents of students
- Flying on small planes/cost of flying/lack of planes on a daily basis
- No local doctor
- Cold weather/gear
- Ordering water/quality of water/purifier
- No restaurants
- No outside entertainment

# Tips for Managing a Multigraded Classroom

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**Planning Lessons**

To save time I plan lessons weekly, not daily. This is important so I don't have to create a mind set on every class for the next day and go scrounging up materials, copying papers and such. While this may seem to preclude flexibility, I feel secure that everything is prepared. If something needs to be changed, fine. If an unexpected learning experience arises, fine. We'll take it. But my good basic learning plan is in place unless something better pops up.

Talking about flexibility, I have changed my classroom schedule many times this year to work around special helpers to try get the best program possible. Some of these changes have been major changes and not just curriculum changes within the day. My motto is, "I have to be organized to be flexible." Otherwise it is just haphazard and not really flexibility for me.

Lesson plans for some classes such as social studies and science are made by the chapter rather than weekly. Once my mind is set on the chapter I can do the lesson plans for three or four weeks in the time it would take to do two weeks at different times and I do a better overall job. I also copy all the papers, find other supplies or materials that will be needed and make charts or sample projects at the same time I write the plans. If the materials I need are perishable or unavailable, I put asterisks to remind myself. That saves wear and tear on the memory which is good self management.

Consumable math and spelling books for grades K to 3 are great. It is easier for the student to work, but for survival's sake, it is much easier on the teacher. Then I don't have to dig through a bunch of papers to know who is done or to see if corrections are done.

Reading lesson plans are done story by story. Teachers in this school have to hand in weekly lesson plans so I may have a couple days plans more than the week done ahead of time. It makes it easier for me to do

lesson plans by story. I started a different way of writing my reading lesson plans this year. I only have 11 students in three primary grades this year, but I have five reading groups. Who can put five groups' lesson plans in the small spaces in the regular lesson plan book anyway?

### Correcting Papers

In my primary classroom all work is to be 100 percent correct or marked with a star made by hand. If a lot of help was needed in working a page a star will be given. Keeping track of all these papers in varying degrees of corrections used to be a headache as I would have to look through the whole packet. Now I will write the number of pages that need attention and the students will look for that many pages. If there are still errors after corrections are made, it will be indicated by the term "still two pages". A star on each sheet or page indicates that corrections have been made. When checking the corrections I will write "all ok" and it will be sent home.

My classroom aide is a godsend in correcting papers. She also came up with the idea of a chart to keep track of completed assignments for each child for each subject every day. Each sheet is for a week. She enters stages of completion, as sheets, text, workbook, etc. She also enters the number wrong so I can easily transfer the information to the grade book later.

### Managing Student Work

I keep each classes' plans in a clear binder with a plastic holder. This way I don't have to open a book to see the lesson plan for the entire week. I store the plan for each class with the teacher's manual, teacher's workbook and weekly worksheets together, but separated from the other classes' materials. When I am ready for a particular group it takes only a little time to have everything back at the table for that reading group. The three upper reading groups, at second grade reading level, have a copy of the weekly plan taped to their desk. This way I don't have to repeat what it is that they are to do. They can also start on some parts of the lesson even if I haven't had time to go over it with them. My lower group of second graders will be getting the plan after Christmas.

The three upper reading groups each have two students. This makes it workable for cooperative learning. Each group reads their story together. Then they have to answer the questions together on one paper and must take turns with the writing. The two groups are working out very well!

Most assignments are written on the blackboard each morning. Each grade has a separate place. This way they can get started right away when they come in the morning. Other times when they finish class work before other class members or I am busy with someone else they can go on to some things without teacher instruction. On lessons where I am introducing new material, or it is material that needs to be further explained, or needs special instructions, or needs special materials, I will write

"wait" or "ask" behind the assignment. Even grade one has the spelling and writing lessons written on the blackboard.

When I had one high school student in a one teacher school, I just gave him a copy of my lesson plans rather than rewriting on the blackboard. In a way it was good for him as he knew what needed to be completed throughout the week.

Some confusion and time can be saved in a multigraded classroom by having all the math papers for the day stapled together and all the reading papers stapled in another packet. This is especially helpful for kindergarten and first grade. In any class where the students get more than one sheet, I collate them beforehand.

I do all the copying and collating on the weekend for each day of the next week. Sometimes I get ambitious and do it for a two week period. I lay out the math papers for every day of the week with the new material I want to cover and the review sheets. They will wait with the new material until I have time to instruct them. The review sheets are very important so learned skills will not be forgotten. This is especially important in a multigraded classroom to keep learned skills as I don't have time to waste to be further explained when the loss of memory could have been prevented much of the time by planned practice. I will continue to do this until a math book that has an organized review comes out for the primary grades.

Even collating is conscious. New work is on top. Review practice pages are arranged from difficult to easy but usually not really difficult ones right on top unless I will be helping that group right away to keep them from being intimidated. Usually hard to easy keeps them motivated to finish. However some students need easy ones to get them started and if the last one is difficult they will continue because it is the end. You have to know your students. Usually difficult to easy works.

Organizing computer programs for primary students in a separate box helps as even the kindergarten students can find their own programs. On some I draw a picture about the program.

My students know there are certain things they can do when they have finished their work without asking me. Listening to tapes, reading library books, working on the computer, drawing or doing other artwork are all activities they can engage in without asking me as long as they have finished all work.

Room organization is also important. Keep instructional materials in a convenient place. If you have to search for your materials you waste time and also allow the students time to get off task. Use bookcases and file cabinets to separate students who are disruptive. Face students in different directions if they can't keep themselves on task. Face the table where you work with individuals or small groups towards the other students so you can see them and so the students with whom you are working will have their backs to the class.

## Rules and Procedures

My students don't need to ask to go to the bathroom or to get a drink. To eliminate abuse of the privilege, they are given tickets. Once the newness of this system wears off most students have tickets left over. The first and second graders have been better with this system than the third graders. It certainly saves on the number of interruptions to instructional time.

Since instruction time is so valuable, one rule I have in the classroom is that no one must interrupt when I am instructing a class and of course no one in that class may leave when I am instructing.

## Organizing Instruction

Common instruction across grade levels is a good management tool as well as being beneficial for the students to learn how to function in a larger group. Art, music, and physical education are best conducted this way. Composing language experience stories across several grade levels is one thing that works very well across several grade levels. After students have some experience with this, they are usually able to compose by themselves even by the middle of kindergarten if they are fairly good students.

If third graders are weak on certain math, grammar, reading or phonetic skills that are currently being taught to the second graders, they are included in the instruction. Sometimes the instruction is first and second grade depending on the skill and the students' needs.

I combined grades one and two for social studies in the first grade books this year as my second graders were not able to read the second grade books at the beginning of the year. We also have better discussions with six students than with a two–four split in two different classes. With more brains working and more time we have a far better learning situation.

# Sample of a completed reading lesson plan

**Name** *Peter and Nicholas* | *Cats Sleep Anywhere* | **Week of** *December 11-15, 1989*

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *TE 394 Index*<br><br>*TE 410 & 411 verb end* | *flaschards* | *Where is your shoebox?* | *Shoebox?*<br><br>*flashcards* | |
| | *vocabulary SK 139*<br>*on flashcards*<br>*TE 402 vocab* | *TE 412 word parts*<br>*also grade 4 for*<br>*wkbk 120*<br>*TE 413 synonyms*<br>*wkbk 121* | *vocabulary SK 145*<br>*on flashcards*<br>*TE 418 vocab* | *Read pgs. 220-225*<br>*do questions pg. 225 together* | *SK 151-156*<br>*review pages* |
| | *Read pgs. 212-219*<br>*Do question pg. 219*<br>*together on paper* | *TE 414 & 415*<br>*main idea wkbk 122*<br>*wbk 120-122*<br>*SK 139-144* | *TE 426 & 427* | *wkbk 123 & 124* | *Get corrections made*<br>*on all workbook and*<br>*skillpad pages*<br>*that you have missed.* |
| | | *Bring shoe box*<br>*for Thursday work* | *find dinosaur book*<br>*in the library* | *make dinosaur*<br>*home with shoebox* | *Test on Monday* |
| **Teacher notes** for daily preparation | *copy TE 94*<br>*for chart* | *copy TE 414 & 415*<br>*no other sheets* | *copy part*<br>*of TE 426 & 427*<br>*and part of*<br>*TE 428* | | |

**Teacher instructions:** **TE** means teacher edition | **Read** means in student text | **SK** means skillpad **wkbk** means workbook | **Worksheets** means sheets prepared for practice on specific skills in addition to basals. | **Flashcards on rings** are for introduced vocabulary

# Early Planning Aids Survival in the Multigraded Classroom

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Teaching in a multigraded classroom demands a great amount of teacher preparation and planning in the initial stages. If this planning takes place, the room will have a greater chance of running smoothly and teacher work time can be decreased. Due to the number of grade levels a teacher must plan and prepare for, efficiency of time and effort is mandatory if one is to survive and be successful. After teaching in a very small bush school in a multigraded classroom consisting of grades 2-5 with a total of 9 students, I found that the areas of classroom organization and management need special consideration and early planning.

## Organization

When planning the organization, one must take into account the type of activity that will take place and the amount of noise that normally would occur with it. The pattern of movement or traffic also needs to be planned so that it will allow for free movement and yet will not disturb others. Each teacher must organize their classroom so that it fits their specific needs and teaching style.

My classroom is organized with a cluster of individual desks in the center of the room to be used for whole group instruction and seat work activities. This provides a "home base" for each student and a place for their personal items. Another area is the teacher's center where direct instruction takes place and the teacher's resources can be kept. It includes a work table, chalk or grease board and a file or short bookcase. The teacher must be able to observe every area of the room from this station. Separate areas or centers are placed around the periphery. These can change periodically and can include a computer center, listening center, reading center, art table and a 'manipulatives' center. The chalkboard should be open and visible as that is where assignments, schedules and communication between teacher and students takes place.

A simple, economical pocket chart can be constructed by cutting paper plates in half and attaching them to a bulletin board or tagboard, back

side out. These can be used to hold computer discs, assignment notes, passes or anything that students may need to use for a particular project. I found it very useful with computer discs for each student. Students can design or decorate the "pockets' or it can be done by the teacher.

## Management

Clear and efficient classroom procedures and routines that are set up by the teacher at the beginning of the school term provide a strong basis for classroom management and discipline. A lot of time needs to be taken to teach to these procedures and routines to insure success. Behaviors and routines can be practiced so that students can experience the correct and expected behaviors. If classroom rules, jobs and responsibilities are clearly posted in the room, it will promote order and efficiency in management.

In my classroom, I write daily assignments and activities on the chalkboard. For me, it serves as the most flexible means since often students are absent, plans need to be changed or skills need to be retaught. This is also the most economical and least time consuming.

With these areas completely planned at the beginning of the year, it can make the burden of preparing multigrade lessons the main task during the year. A small multigraded classroom, when operating efficiently and smoothly can take on a family-like atmosphere and be a rewarding experience for a teacher.

## Suggested Reading

Our district has just made available a book that is excellent for helping any teacher in a multigraded classroom. It is:

***The Multigraded Classroom; A Resource Handbook for Small, Rural Schools***

By Bruce A. Miller September 1989

Rural Education Program
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main St. Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

# Teaching Kindergarten in Mountain Village

Deborah Lee Bishop

Mountain Village School
Mountain Village, Alaska

In retrospect, I laughingly referred to the multigrade teaching time at Kotlik, Alaska as my schizophrenia period of my career. But until I figured some management techniques that helped smooth and integrate the curriculum, the students, and my style of teaching, I had some rough moments, including two self-induced unplanned haircuttings from frustration.

As I unpacked my materials in my "new" room overlooking the slough, I was pleased with my river view. I was in the middle of the village and on the main pathway through the village. My windows were at the height of the walkers on the boardwalk, so we could display many things for the community to see. I was looking forward to this assignment with older students, after 11 years with five and six year olds. In my three year stay at Kotlik, I had a third/fourth combination, and fourth/fifth combination with third/eighth in reading. My smallest class was sixteen which swelled to twenty-two for reading lessons.

I quickly found that I needed to contain all the paper generated by these students. I set up a checking table separate from my desk where all assignments were turned in. I taught the students to alphabetize their work and turn them in in subject folders in that order. I could open the grade book and go right down the names and record grades. I hung a list of each grade's names from the checking table to help students get the work in correctly. Each subject had a colored folder (both grades had the same color). I used a plastic file divider for all subjects for one grade. That sat on the table just above the list. My grade book/ruler/calculator/easy grader were also on this table at all times. I did leave room on the table for journals and workbooks, or special project. Besides the grade book, I kept a colored folder on each child for informal assessments, dated copies of writing I wished to save, and notes to myself on the child. I also kept a sheet on each student listing parent contacts.

I used clipboards for many things. One had a xeroxed class list on it. This was handy for remembering who returned slips that needed to be turned

into the office, giving names to the dentist/doctor who flew in that day, any record keeping you as the teacher may need, valentine lists, whose turn it is for something, etc. Two other clipboards had reading lessons on them, one for the aide and one for myself. Beside the columns of assignments, I left daily spaces for homework, special needs of students, a teacher space for what I need to have ready for the lesson for that day, and a reaction column to quickly note during or after a lesson what worked, what did not work, or particular problems a student might have.

Homework was a particular area that needed visual aids. With one class, I had two different spiral notebooks on the front chalkboard and a homework captain for each grade who wrote in the date, absent students' names, and the assignment. When the absent student checked the homework book and took down the assignments, the name was circled. With another class, I wrote all homework on a wipeable slate. Students could refer to the slate. Another group of students needed particular help in remembering what subjects were assigned for homework. I had a cardboard pocket chart at the door labeled with each subject. Any subject with a red flag placed in it was designated homework. We also devised a "study buddy" system. Each person had a partner in class who would take down assignments and collect handouts when he or she was absent.

I have always posted the schedule for the day in a pocket chart for myself to follow and to help the students. I like the pocket chart because subjects can easily be switched. I like the routine of the chart and feel it helps the students plan their day. The posted schedule did come in handy for students planning their computer time on the one computer in the classroom.

Students in my class used assignment sheets. I had a graduated list of sheets that put more and more responsibility on each student as they matured and could handle the increased responsibility. I also used the computer to tailor some assignment sheets to particular student needs.

I felt the students should be responsible for as much as possible in the class to promote ownership of the room, provide decision making opportunities, and suggest improvements. We modeled our class after the City Council with an monthly elected Mayor who ran class meetings. Other students had particular responsibilities as needed. Some of the homework ideas, assignment sheets, and other student concerns came out of these meetings.

I wanted the students to maintain a neat desk in order to find materials, be current on assignments, and spend their time wisely in working not searching. I got a small plastic basket for each student for pencils, pens, and personal items. Their journals and library or pleasure reading books were also kept in their desks. School work in the desk was work not done. All completed work was turned in to the checking table and text books were kept out of the desks upon completion of assignments. A running list of ideas was left up on paper or the board to help the student who asked "What do I do now ?"

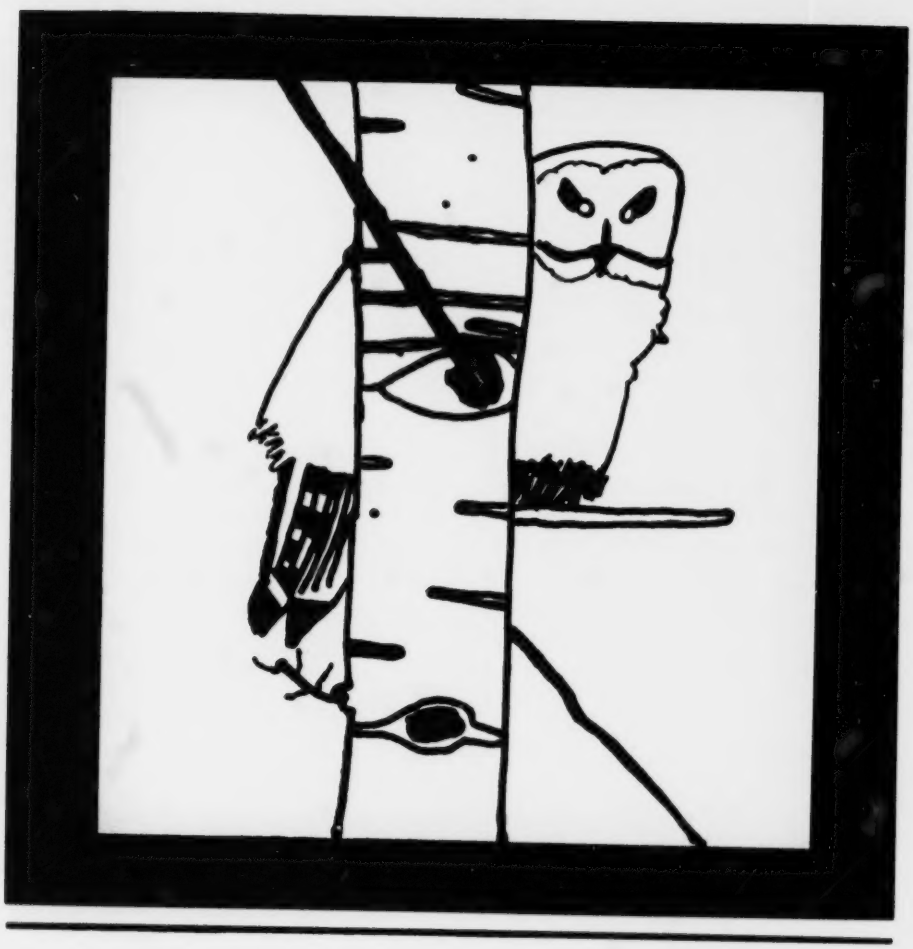
Coordination of the curriculum of the varied books and subjects took some juggling. I would suggesting taking an overview of the materials at hand and deciding what you can use and how it should be taught to the students. See if some subjects can be taught together as a group experience. Use cooperative learning groups to handle difficult material. Mapping became an important pre-teaching, review, and extension of ideas and I used it in almost all subjects. Find some supplemental materials that can help you teach to a variety of student needs. I especially like the Copycat Magazine, Cobblestone, and Nature Scope.

It was at Kotlik that the computer and I developed a partnership for my lesson plans. I now have used the computer for five years and am delighted to do my lessons on it. I do the lessons on Thursdays and turn them in on Friday mornings. I used to spend hours just planning the reading lessons and again that much time on the rest of the subjects and hand writing the lessons. The computer has cut this down considerably. At Kotlik, I did my grades on the computer but still haven't found that I saved time there so I did give that up.

My students had many assignments that were on-going but did not always understand where to begin or pick up on them. I used strips of construction paper slipped into assignments that I wanted students to finish first before going on to any other assignments. These assignments were on their tables or desks when they arrived in the morning. They were also taught to fill out assignment sheets when they arrived. This particularly helped the reading class of third through eighth graders who arrived and left at varying times due to other schedules.

Besides the management ideas that develop as a teacher works with a class, it was most helpful to me to develop a good working relationship with my aide. I had different women who worked with me and mentored me in the village perspective of student habits. They continually gave tips and helped me. I gave them responsibility and asked their opinions on wording letters to parents, how to help a student understand a difficult concept, and how the day went from their point of view. I also spent time teaching them what I wanted or expected from the students, how the class should be operating, and what they should do in certain situations. I wanted a teaching partner in the room and all the women who helped me did a wonderful job.

I enjoyed the students at Kotlik and feel they worked hard to do their best for me. The relationships that developed between the students and teachers is unlike others I have experienced. The intimacy did not detract from the school atmosphere but enhanced the personal relationship with the students. They knew I would be there to help them. That in turn helped me to understand them when I made home visits or participated in community activities such as Easter races or Eskimo dancing. I recall fondly those years of a multigrade experience and feel that it was a great growing time for me as a teacher. My classroom now has pictures of all my Alaska students with the caption "Wonderful Students, Wonderful Years." I mean that sincerely.



# Teaching Creative Thinking Skills in the Multigraded, Multi-subject Classroom

Bambi Phipps

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I teach in Sleetmute, a village of 110 people on the middle Kuskokwim River. We have 25 students in our school and three teachers. In past years I have taught grades 9-12 all subjects. This year I have grades 2-12 for English, social studies and health.

As any teacher in a small rural school will tell you, the most difficult job we face is teaching all of those subjects to all of those levels. With careful planning it can be done. But students often spend much of their time working individually on written lessons. The opportunities for interaction on an exciting creative level are few. Because I find this so boring for the students and myself, I am always looking for ways to group students for research, discussions, and projects. This search for curriculum materials that lend themselves to group work, combined with what I perceive as a real need among my students for formal teaching of creative thinking skills, has led me to the Future Problem Solving Program.

This is a state and national program designed to encourage students to learn and use six steps in creative problem solving. The steps are universally applicable. The problems deal with current, real-life dilemmas. The problem situations are set in the future.

This is our second year of involvement in the program. The kids have learned more than I ever expected and we have all had fun in the process. I use the program with my 4th through 12th grades. We find ways to include it at some point across all of our subject areas. The skills learned in FPS are now part of everything we do.

It is my intent in this article to show other teachers how teaching creative thinking skills and, specifically, involvement in the Future Problem Solving (FPS) program can impact the dynamics of the multigraded, multi-subject classroom and hopefully give students skills which will carry over to their daily lives now and in their futures.

Until recently, the language arts curriculums of most school systems listed skills taught as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Thinking skills were implied under these headings, but seldom listed as a separate subject. Today educators recognize the importance of teaching students how to think. Whereas we assumed before, that if we included questions on a critical analysis level students would learn to answer them, we now know that the brain, like any muscle, needs exercise. By using specific activities and by teaching students problem solving steps, we give them valuable practice in creative thinking.

Some of the exercises are brainstorming, categorizing by different methods, and developing criteria. These exercises prepare students to approach any problem using the following six basic steps:

- After identifying a problem situation, brainstorm all the sub-problems related to it.
- State the overall problem clearly, including general statements which encompass all the sub-problems.
- Brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem.
- Develop some criteria for evaluating the solutions. These should include consequences to be considered.
- Evaluate the solutions.
- Clearly state the best solution with all of its parts.

I have found these steps to be useful in all of our subject areas. My students are able to take the topics in their texts and expand the way they look at them. A social studies lesson on the American Revolution or a health lesson on human reproduction both yield opportunities to use the problem solving model. We can use all or only some of the steps. What problems were created by the colonists' desire for independence? What solutions did they use? Which solutions worked and why? What problems are inherent in parenthood? How might one deal with these problems?

We use brainstorming all of the time. A writing assignment will include the step of developing topic ideas, then listing key words for a topic. We categorize the key words and we have paragraphs.

I also encourage the kids to remember and use their newly acquired skills in all aspects of their lives. Problem...the city has no money to throw the usual March carnival...What can we do? Problem...my "gram" wants to have her own house, but she needs lots of attention...How can I help her? I believe that my students will be better equipped to deal with life if they learn and practice creative thinking now. They will be the leaders of tomorrow's villages and corporations. Hopefully, their problem solving experiences will stay with them.

The Future Problem Solving Program is easy to enter. I learned about it through a flyer that was mailed to my school. Every year a teacher-coach training is conducted and teachers have the chance to attend and receive

valuable training in coaching students as problem solving teams. The training is great. I took it myself two years ago. But for those interested in the program who don't have the opportunity to attend a training, there is a coaches' manual and a video available. Once you get your name on the mailing list, you can order at reasonable cost all the materials needed to participate. For a fee you can have your students' problem packets evaluated by experienced judges. Best of all, your team will have a chance to compete against other teams around the state and possibly win a trip to the state competition.

FPS can be used as an extra-curricular activity. It has all the elements of competition and possible travel which appeal to students. It can also be used, as I do it, as part of the curriculum if it is worked into social studies, English, health, or science. I teach the thinking skills and problem solving steps in English and review them regularly. We practice them with any subject matter that lends itself to the model. We cover the background research material in social studies or other content areas where it applies. All of the topics are timely—the arms race, environmental issues, and nutrition, to name a few.

When it's time to do the actual problem packet, I sometimes schedule it during school, sometimes after school, depending on whether all my students are involved with the competing teams. We pick teams from everyone in class. Those showing the highest interest level sometimes compose the teams. Sometimes we need everyone.

FPS issues three problem packets yearly. There are deadlines for the completion of each packet. Students prepare for the problem packets by studying articles related to the topic, by practicing the six steps on theoretical problems, and by doing problem solving exercises. The actual problem packet isn't seen by the teams until the time they receive it to work on it for two hours. The two hour work session is strictly monitored. Teams have no notes and receive no coaching. They must know the six steps and complete the packet as a team.

A team is made up of four people in the grade division in which the team is competing. The junior division is grades 4-6 . Intermediate is 7-8 and high school 9-12. All divisions deal with the same problem. I find that this is the key to being able to use the program so effectively with multi-graded classes. We can all discuss and read and focus on the same subject and on the same process. The younger kids will approach it a little differently and will be evaluated differently, but we have a huge common base to draw on. Because of the teamwork aspect, I can group my kids and monitor the individual groups, but, if a question arises which I feel needs to be discussed with the whole group, we can return to large group discussion until everyone understands the issue. The handouts, the vocabulary, and the method of approach are the same for grades 4-12.

The future time setting for the problems in the program makes FPS an exciting chance for students to use their imaginations. It also lends another dimension to problem solving ideas. We incorporated a unit on The Future into our science and social studies curriculum last year. The re-

search the kids did for that gave them lots of ideas about alternate energy sources in FPS. Any solution which they want to create can count if they're able to justify how it could be possible in the future. This kind of thinking opens up new worlds to kids who are used to being limited to the here and now.

Developing criteria by which to evaluate solutions necessitates that students look at things from many aspects. Values like humaneness and expediency are examined. The practical is weighed against the long-lasting. The debates arising from these issues are a whole education in themselves.

I find that once we study an issue, the students begin to notice that topic in the news and in their reading. "Oh, they had a guy on T.V. last night who talked about the Salt Treaty." There is a real sense of pride in the fact that they know more about current political and economic issues than they did before.

If one accepts the idea that it's important for students to be exposed to thinking skills, I can't think of a better way to get started than by getting involved in FPS. The program's versatility allows a teacher to use it in a limited or an extended approach. It can be a classroom or an extra-curricular activity. It can be competitive or not. Packets can be evaluated or not. It can be free or you'll have to spend a little money.

The skills needed to solve FPS problems apply to everything students study or are involved in. The imagination has a chance to work overtime. Values are tested. Involvement in current affairs is promoted.

Most importantly, this program will allow the teacher in the small rural classroom to enjoy a rare opportunity to blend the elements of the classroom. The rows of quietly working students can become dynamic groups of three and four discussing futuristic solutions to critical world problems.

Lesson plans can be geared to a range of age groups and abilities. Cross-curriculum units can lend spice to the daily routine. And, hopefully, you will see the enormous impact on students' thinking processes that I have experienced.

More information about the Future Problem Solving Program is available from:

Alaska Management Technologies Inc.
240 Main Street, Suite 701
Juneau, Alaska 99801

# Computers in a Multigraded Classroom

Deanna Cole

George Willis School
Red Devil, Alaska

Computers can be a great management tool, or they can be a headache, or they can sit and gather dust. Getting the best use of your computers depends on three things: your knowledge and enthusiasm as the teacher, the accessibility of the computers/programs to the students, and the ways in which you structure their use.

I've learned that we needn't fear computers; we can learn their mysteries bit by bit, just as we expect students to learn. Many multigraded classroom teachers don't have the luxury of a computer lab, or even a computer expert in their school. But never fear. The technology of computers is so fascinating to students that they are compelled, even motivated to learn before you do. Then they teach each other. Get out the documentation and teach them to use it; they can practice reading while they learn to operate the computer. Before long, you will have a few students who are "experts." Plan your schedule so these students can assist their classmates. Their help will be invaluable, and they will learn as they teach. More on scheduling later....

If you are a beginner yourself, make some time after school to learn the basics—how to turn on the computer, manage the disks, use the documentation. Most programs have good screen prompts, and some have good tutorials. Work through these before you introduce them to students. It also helps to have a telephone number for a computer expert handy when you reach the frustration level. Check with your administrators; they might make a computer available to you evenings and weekends for your convenience in learning the programs.

As you become a computer operator, you will see possibilities for a computer within the framework of your classroom. Students will also have ideas that work. Remember, there is no "right" way to do it. Try different things until you find the one that works for your class. It helps to keep the computer mobile, so you can easily change its location if it becomes apparent that you need to do so.

There are some frustrations you should expect. Hardware problems, user "unfriendly" software, and village power problems can alter your use of computers. One of the most frustrating things about computers is that there are so many programs that it's hard to know which ones are right for your class. "Only the Best" by Shirley and George Neill is an annual guide to the highest-rated educational software. It gives valuable information which is easy to use, such as which programs work on which computers, a brief synopsis of each program, and a list of software producers. Keep your selection simple: a word processor, a simple graphics program, and a selection of interactive content area programs for drill/simulation. Drill and practice is good for rote learning, but interactive programs allow for more student interaction, and more lasting learning.

Computers have to be located so that students can use them easily and without disturbing others. They also need to be located so that you can help students who are having problems, and still keep your eye on the rest of the class. Computers should be located away from chalkboards and heavy traffic areas. I have found that when the function dictates the location, I get the best use of the computers.

For example, the desktop publishing center is located at one side of the room, against one end of the bulletin board. There is space behind the center to post directions, schedules, and samples of student work. The center has a Mac SE, a MacPlus, and a Laser printer networked together. The computers are situated so that one to three students can work around each computer, allowing six students to use the center at one time. Programs and documentation to be used are located in the center.

Our multimedia center is portable so its components can be moved to either classroom, or the gymnasium. It consists of a T.V. set, a IIGS computer with a video overlay card, a VCR, a camcorder, and programs for video graphics. Students learn to use the center in stages: first, the video graphics software and the TV monitor, then the camcorder and connections to the VCR, and finally, how to conceptualize putting a commercial together with all the components. In order to maximize the use of the computer when we're not doing a video project, a word processor, graphics, and drill/simulations are also included in the center.

Apple 2e and Compaq computers provide a third center where content areas such as Math, Biology, Geography, English, Chemistry, Physics, SAT preparation can be explored. Appleworks and Word Perfect (word processors) diversify this center so students can also write papers, keep data bases and spreadsheets up to date.

All centers have keyboarding software so students can practice keyboarding skills throughout the year.

I schedule student use of the computer with either formal demonstrations or on weekly assignment sheets, or for random use. During the first three weeks of school, I give group demonstrations in desktop publishing, video desktop publishing, graphics, and word processing at each center as often as possible. We create signs, notes to parents, simple

graphics, and screens for movies. By the end of three weeks, there will be a handful of students who have "caught on" to the basic process at each center. These students become student helpers at each center, and gradually tutor others. At the end of three weeks, I seldom have to spend a lot of time at any of the centers. Whenever I want to teach something new, I hold another demonstration, and change experts if necessary. Initially, I post reminders and directions where students can see them. I always include the use of documentation in the demonstrations.

As different projects come up (newsletter, posters, notices, writing activities, graphics competitions, drill/practice) students will be scheduled on their weekly assignment sheets to use the computer, and they will use the computers at random as they have free time during class.

# More Like a School Family Than Just a Teacher And His or Her Students– Is a One Teacher School For You?

Lance C. Blackwood

Egegik School
Egegik, Alaska

**Preface**

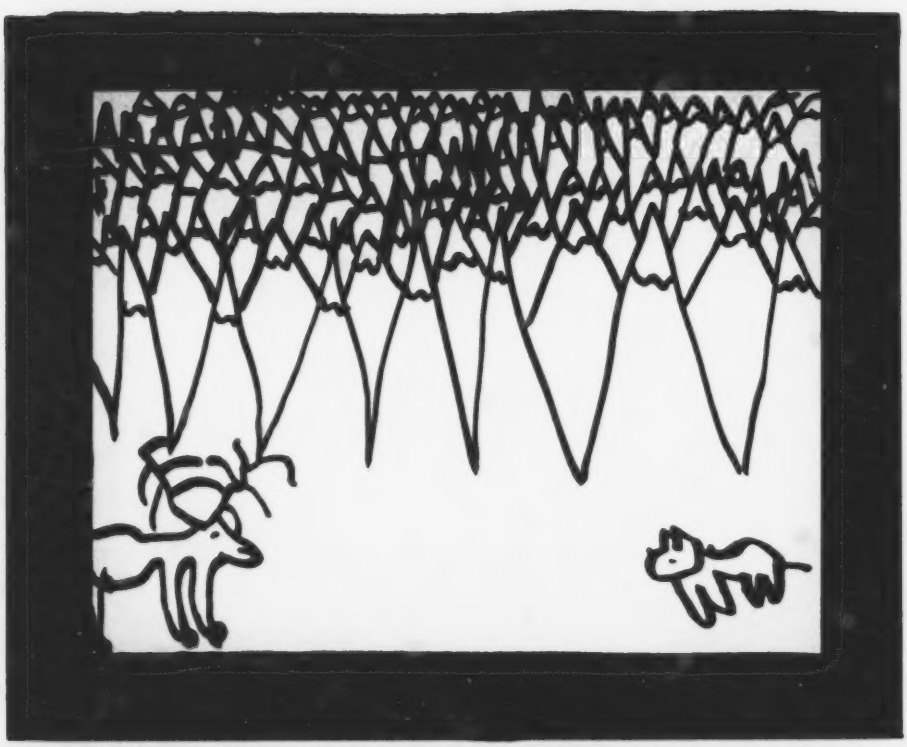
The pages you are about to read contain, for the most part, one teacher's opinion about how to successfully and effectively teach in a small one teacher school, or other multigraded setting, in rural Alaska. These opinions are based upon ten years of my own teaching experience in rural Alaska, and also the experiences other teachers in a similar settings.

I have attempted to be as objective, honest, and sincere as possible, in order to benefit those teachers who may, in the near future, decide to teach in the rural areas of the state. If, in describing or commenting on any particular group of people, one feels I have done a disservice to them or presented an unfair profile, it was not done intentionally or consciously.

Overall, I have the utmost respect for the Lake and Peninsula School District, and all the employees and other people it encompasses, especially its village residents, along with the children and young adults we are trying to educate. This was written ultimately for the benefit of all the children and students in the rural areas of the state.

I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance, critical reviews, and encouragement in writing this: Mrs. Nina Furman; Mrs. Josie Williams; Norman Peter Olsen; Mr. Frank Hill; Dr. M. Bruce Slama; Ms. Helen Bowers; and Ms. June I. Degman.

-Lance Blackwood



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# Part One

# What Makes an Effective Teacher in Rural Alaska?

***Is it:***

***Self-confidence?***

***Commitment?***

***Preparation/Organization?***

***Cultural Sensitivity/Student Sensitivity?***

***Flexibility?***

***Personality/Attitude?***

***District Central Office/Other Support Personnel?***

***Educational Background?***

***A Varied Personal Background?***

***A Male or Female?***

I will address each of these qualities and then rank them on a scale of 1 to 10. (1 being the highest quality I feel is needed and 10 being the least significant quality needed to be effective.)

## Self Confidence

I think you can already guess where I will rank this quality. I feel strongly that this is the single most important quality a rural teacher needs, especially if he or she teaches in a one-teacher school.

Please don't misinterpret self-confidence for cockiness—there is a big difference. When I refer to self-confidence in a teacher, I mean: That teacher feels he/she can step into the classroom with 10-15 students, grades K-8, and do the job he/she was hired to do by the District, and is expected to do by the parents of those children.

How you go about doing it may vary from teacher to teacher, but, having that feeling of trust and confidence in yourself and your abilities as a teacher is the most important quality you should possess.

Make decisions based on what you feel is in the overall best interest of the student(s) or the school. Be willing to accept the consequences, either positive or negative, of those decisions.

This does not necessarily mean you will automatically achieve success, progress, and personal satisfaction with each and every student for whom you have responsibility. You will discover some students are a joy and breeze to work with; others will progress along as expected. A few

will challenge you and some will fully test your confidence and ability level.

You will no doubt, as I have, make your share of bleeps and blunders as you teach in this unique setting. But, if you have that high degree of self-confidence in yourself as a teacher, you **will** make progress, albeit in varying degrees, with your students. Just keep believing in yourself.

### Commitment

I remember one of my professors at Bridgewater State College (BSC) telling us..."If you are going into teaching for the money, or you feel its an easy job, get out of it now...do something else for a living." I think you would agree he was correct. You can't be an effective teacher in a small rural school, or in any school, unless you are committed to what you are there for.

That doesn't mean you can't have other interests and/or commitments—family, hobbies, sports, recreational activities, or even a part-time business. I do feel, however, you have to keep a proper perspective on why you are out there. Why have you chosen (if you are a non-native) to leave your home, family, friends, and your accustomed pattern of life?

You have left this all behind because you have made the decision to teach in rural Alaska; then that is what you should focus on while you are there. Whatever you, as the only teacher in that school, have to do to try and get through to your students, or to get the job done—do it!

Feel free to complain to your Central Office Administrator... talk to yourself if you feel the need...bang your head against the wall when things seem to be building up against you. Do whatever you like, but just get the job done no matter how may hours it takes for you to accomplish all that is required of you—do it!

Teaching in a small one or two teacher school has many benefits, as well as its share of drawbacks (which I will mention later). One thing you can count on—if something needs to be done and you don't do it, chances are it won't get done.

Please don't misunderstand this statement. School cooks, custodians, maintenance personnel, local school committees, administrators, parents, and the District school board members all play roles in contributing to an effective rural school. But, no one puts in as many hours at your school as you do. You are the single most important element. See to it that duties are accomplished. Commit yourself to the school routine. It is primarily your responsibility.

### Preparation/Organization

Another professor at BSC said to us one time,"Don't ever walk into a classroom unprepared. It will be one of the most miserable experiences you will ever have in teaching." He was correct.

In a multigraded school or classroom, being prepared ahead of time and having your materials organized can make the difference between a relaxed, pleasant, and effective teaching experience, and a classroom filled with tension, students off tasks for long periods of times, and confusion.

No two teachers prepare for their classrooms quite the same way. This is due, I feel, to the fact that no two teachers teach quite the same way.

I've seen some teachers write the most detailed and complete lesson plans you would ever want to see. Others, like myself, write very brief, to the point plans with key words or phrases that serve as a reminder of what that lesson entails. Still others write coded lesson plans, that only they can understand.

In my opinion, each of these types of lesson plans would be considered appropriate if they all lead to the same results– effective teaching on the part of the teacher, and learning on the part of the students.

On thing I do before school opens in the fall, which helps keep things moving along smoothly, is run off or make copies of as many materials as I can that I think I will need during the school year. Some examples are:

- manuscript/cursive practice sheets
- any worksheets that accompany each textbook
- any tests that accompany each textbook
- name sheets, days of the week/months of the year practice sheets, and
- ANYTHING I think I might use during the school year, I run off or copy.

Then, I file these materials and pull them out later as I need them. I even place the worksheets and test sheets I use in science and social studies right in the teacher's editions, chapter by chapter, so I don't have to waste time pulling them from the filing cabinet.

Granted, all this copying of materials does require many hours and days of work. But, it is worth it to me and allows me more time as the year progresses to concentrate on the more important aspects of teaching.

Please keep in mind that you are most likely going to do all of this copying and filing of materials yourself as you will not have the luxury of a secretary in your small school. So, the more minor details and aspects of your teaching duties you can do before school opens, the less divided and crammed will be your workday.

### Cultural Sensitivity/Student Sensitivity

How may times have we heard fellow teachers say something like: "I really don't care if my students like me or not, as long as they respect me and do their work." I used to agree with that statement, but not any more.

One of the benefits of being an itinerant teacher during my first three years with Lake and Peninsula School District was, that I was able to work with, talk with, and observe many teachers in multigraded classrooms. Also, I received a first-hand look at teaching materials that seemed to work with students in different grade levels and schools. But, most importantly, I was able to observe how these teachers interacted with their students and how they dealt with their students on a day-to-day basis.

All the teachers I worked with and observed did things a bit differently, naturally, as each group of students had their own characteristics. But one thing did stand out above everything else: I noticed if the students liked their teacher, and felt their teacher liked them as well, the atmosphere of the school and/or classroom was much more conducive to learning and growing.

This may seem like an obvious, or even trite statement, but keep in mind you are the only teacher those students are going to have, not only all day long, but all year long, and who knows how many years. So, from the teacher's and the student's points of view, this becomes a very big factor in determining whether:

- School becomes a positive and enjoyable experience for learning for the student; and
- teaching becomes a positive and enjoyable profession.

I believe you can't "make" a student like you any more than you as a teacher can "make" yourself like any particular student. But, I believe there are some things you might want to consider, when you teach in a small school when You are the only teacher those students will have all year, that might help you all get along in a more positive manner.

## Our Teacher the Preacher

Generally, I've found students in these rural areas do not like preaching. By preaching, I mean rambling on and on about a topic when a more brief explanation would have sufficed. Say what you have to say, but don't use verbal overkill. If you absolutely have to speak for an extended period of time on a particular subject, you might want to pause frequently, to give your students time to react to your comments, in the form of discussion, rather than a lecture.

## Hesitations

We, as teachers, often expect to receive a quick response to our questions and queries. When we don't, we sometimes feel a bit frustrated in our students for not learning the information well enough, and in ourselves for not teaching the material thoroughly. I think you will find if you can just bite your tongue a bit, and hold back just a little longer before supplying the answer, you may find you will receive more responses. Just give your students "time" to formulate a thought and they will most likely give you

a response of some kind. Rural native students are not necessarily any more or less shy than urban or non-native students. Be patient.

### Yelling

Rural Native Alaskan students generally do not receive loud verbal scoldings from adults. Over the years, I have lost my temper several times and verbally exploded, lighting into an individual student or group of students. I have learned this does more harm than good, especially to the older student(s). Their feelings of self-worth and "honor" are devastated momentarily (and perhaps longer). Regarding an older student, you may lose that student's trust and respect for good. It is a public humiliation they just are not accustomed to receiving. (But, then again—who is?)

Not only does the student feel badly after a verbal thrashing, but I feel badly as well. After thinking about it, I usually conclude I could have dealt with the situation in another manner, perhaps by taking away the student's recess time, moving the student away from the rest of the class, or sending the student back to their seat and having him/her cool off and settle down.

If you feel you have unjustly yelled at a student, by all means apologize to that student. It may not repair all the damage done, but at least the student will know you made a mistake and were willing to admit it.

So, try to avoid losing your temper, and do not yell and scream at your students no matte how angry you may feel.

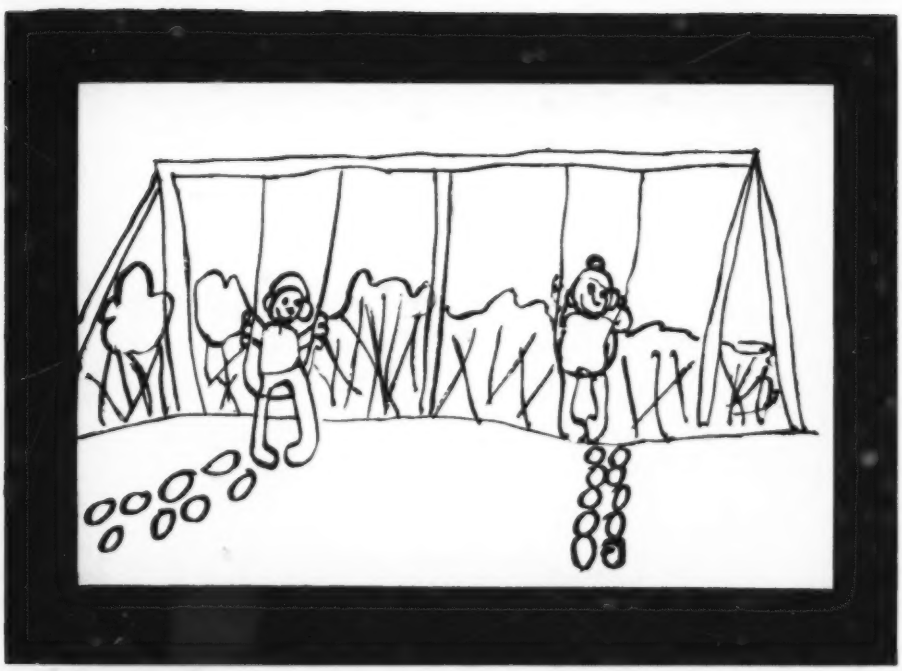
### Directions

Very simply, keep your directives simple, consistent, and to the point.

- "Do something quitely at your desk..."
  (Means the student has completed his assignment and there isn't enough time left in the period to begin another assignment, so the student can have free time. But, the student must not disturb the rest of the students who may be still working otherwise, he will receive another assignment.)
- "Let's have a seat now, gang..."
  (Means, put everything away, get a drink of water or go to the bathroom now, because it is time to start school.)
- "Let's get ready for lunch..."
  (Means pick up and put everything away and have a seat at your desk. I will then call the students one at a time to be dismissed.)
- "Nathan, your assignment is on the board..."
  (Means time for that student to get out his books as recess is now over.)
- "Megan's group—come up with your reading books, please..."
  (Means it is that group's turn to come up with their reading books, but they don't have to bring up their workbook, only

their textbook, because they always attempt their workbook pages at their desks independently. The next day, we do those pages together that were too difficult for them to do independently.)

- "Let's pick up your mess now..."
  (Means, recess is about over, or it is time to get ready for lunch, or, it is time to get ready to go home.)
- "Jason, get out your math book and work in it during recess..."
  (Means, I caught Jason off task for a longer period of time than necessary during math and now he has to make up for that time during recess.)



Overall, I try to minimize my directives as much as possible and eliminate others altogether. For example, one thing I didn't want to keep doing each morning was to give a verbal directive to have the students stand for the pledge to the flag, so I came up with an old stimulus–response routine.

In Pilot Point School, after reviewing calendar skills with the younger students, I would walk to the back of the classroom. The students quickly caught on–when I started to walk in this direction, it was time to stand up and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I also use the same routine with my students here in Egegik. I therefore have eliminated one less verbal directive.

## Humor in the Classroom

"I'm not here to be their friend and joke with them. They've enough friends. I'm here to teach them how to read, write, spell, and do math."

After working with and observing this teacher during my three years as an itinerant teacher, and after going over this teacher's test results on his students, ("his" can refer to either gender), I felt he did a very good job of teaching the basic skills to his students.

But, the tension and regimentation in his classroom was quite evident. I do believe he was indeed committed to his profession, as I saw him check over each and every problem, alphabet letter, word sentence, and worksheet his students passed in, every day. He kept those students on task 99% of the time. He also knew the strengths and weakness of each of his students. If he couldn't find ready-made extra practice sheets to attack those weak areas, he would make them up himself. He would drill those students over and over again until they mastered a particular skill to his satisfaction.

The students could not get out of their seats without his permission, not to sharpen a pencil, get a piece of paper, blow their nose, ask for help, and heaven forbid, if one of those students had to go to the bathroom other than at recess time.

Even P.E., a time when you should allow your students (especially your more active and physical students) to let loose and burn off some of that pent up energy, was a drill. "First group - ready - and skip two - three - four - five - six - seven - eight." "Second group - ready - and skip two - three - four - five - six - seven - eight."

In my three years of observing this teacher, I never once saw him smile at a student, laugh with a student, talk with a student about anything of a personal nature, such as hobbies, toys, games, or their family. I like to think he did, when I was not around, but I never witnessed it. To this teacher, it was strictly business, no funny stuff.

Granted, there were a couple of students who were a handful, but the majority of them seemed like the nicest students you would want to have in your school. It was obvious the students didn't much care for their teacher. School was not a fun or pleasant place to be. If he could only

have eased up on them some and allowed himself to laugh, smile, joke, and just talk with these students on a more personal scale, it would have made for a much more pleasant experience for all involved.

But, in this teacher's defense, those students did learn to read, write, spell, and do math. He was one of the hardest working teachers I had observed. He was in the classroom at 7:30 a.m. and did not leave it until 5:00 p.m., and then, he usually took papers to his apartment to correct later in the evening.

If a parent only wanted their child to learn to read, write, spell, and do math, this would be the ideal teacher. However, if a parent wanted their child to learn all those skills plus be allowed to:

- make a mess on the floor with paper, crayons, and scissors;
- hum a song softly to himself while working at his desk;
- blurt out a bit of information he/she had just read in a book or magazine to the whole class;
- do a series of cartwheels from one end of the classroom to the other during recess,

then, they might want to think twice about sending their child to this teacher.

It was just this teacher's personality and make-up. He did not know any other way to be. I still feel this teacher truly cared for his students and wanted to give each the best education possible. He just was not meant to be a teacher in a small one-teacher school.

Humor was certainly not part of his repertoire in teaching. You don't have to be a stand-up comic, but it would not hurt if you could learn to laugh and joke occasionally with your students, as long as it is not at the expense of someone else's dignity or self-worth in the classroom, and the students do not take advantage of it in order to avoid their assignments.

Just to give you one example of what I mean. It was during reading time, I had the kindergarten group up with me at the work table, the rest of the students were at their desks, and one student came up to me to receive help while one of the kindergarten students and I were briefly discussing a comedy that was on TV the night before. This conversation triggered a response from the student who came up to get help. She commented she too knew this particular song that was sung on the show. She and I then proceeded to sing a duet of this song. Naturally, this had disrupted the entire class, but it was worth it for two reasons– it was important to that student to sing it, right then and there, and also, we received a nice round of applause for our efforts!! I then proceeded to help the student with the page she was having difficulty with and the rest of the class went back to their assignments.

## Teacher As a Friend

In my opinion, about the only way not to become friends with your students in a small one teacher school, is to make a conscious effort not to get close to them. Otherwise, it is almost automatic that you will become close to your students.

Even though you may not consider any of your students true friends, you may have some students who consider you their friend. You may go hunting, trapping, skiing, snow-going, or three-wheeling together. With others, you may share a similar hobby. Of course, you will become closer to some students than to others. But you will come to know all your students in great detail, and they you, over time. You will find yourself doing for these students like you have never done for a group before, as you become more like a "school family" rather than just a teacher and his/her students.

You naturally see more of your students outside of the formal school setting, in a small village, than you would in an urban town or city. You will frequent their homes, and they yours. However, in these small rural villages, everyone is on a first name basis. Young children also refer to adults on a first name basis.

How you wish to be called in your school or classroom is up to you. But, you had better make the students aware of it the first day of school, as they will naturally want to call you by your first name. Generally, this should not cause you any major problems. The students and parents will most likely respect your wishes if you prefer to be addressed as Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Mr. I was on a first name basis with my students in Pilot Point School mainly because that is how the students knew me when I was an itinerant teacher. Here in Egegik, I told the students the first day of school I wanted to be called Mr. Blackwood, or Mr. B., and not by my first name, even though they all knew what it was. Most of the students did not have any problems respecting my wish. However, one older student, who was very close to the teacher I had replaced and was on a first name basis with, did not like this request. Although this student complied with my wish, he/she felt somewhat offended by this.

## Interacting Socially with Your Students

By this, I simply mean taking the time to play with your students during recesses and lunch breaks. You do not have to necessarily go outside with them every day or at every recess period. There also may be some students who do not wish to have your company during these breaks, as they might consider it their time to socialize among themselves.

This kind of interacting with students is even more important when, in my current situation, I have only two older male students. When the weather is nice we usually go out to the playdeck and play basketball. For one of these students in particular, this is obviously appreciated very much. His ball skills have improved dramatically since we first began about a year ago.

As for the younger students, they may be perfectly content to play by themselves, but they certainly appreciate an extra push from behind when they are on the swings, or an extra fast spin on the merry-go-round equipment.

When the weather is too cold or nasty to go outside during recesses, we often break out the jump ropes or use the nerf balls to get some kind of organized activity going. Other times, it is every student for themselves, and nothing special goes on.

Many times, students will come to me after school and/or on the weekend to request a pick up game of some sort with some other students or adults in the community. They certainly appreciate you taking the time to participate with them.

The point is, what you might think of as nothing special, or no big deal, perhaps to your students, or at least some of your students, the fact you are taking time to join them at recess times or after school, could make a big difference in how they perceive you.

### Freedom of Movement Within the Classroom and Among the School

This is probably tied very closely to how each individual teacher teaches and views their style of classroom management. I personally find it difficult to impose restrictions upon students getting out of their seats to sharpen a pencil, get a piece of paper, get a dictionary, go to the bathroom, ask another student for help, get a library book in the next room, or even stand by their desk to do their work instead of sitting in their seat.

I suppose in a class of 25-30 students, I could see where some orderliness would be called for. But in a class of 10-15 students, I generally don't have any specific set of rules for such movement.

However, there will always be a few students who, realizing I do not have any set rules pertaining to such movement, will inevitably take advantage of this. I still feel I should not restrict the whole class because of the actions of a few students, but rather, deal with those students who appear to be taking their freedom of movement a bit too far. This can be done in a few ways. I can make a general announcement before I begin each day, that I am concerned about this matter; speak to those students individually about it; or simply have those student(s) make up the time they wasted at recess time.

In this area, I try to put myself in the students' position. I believe it is asking a lot to expect students to raise their hand each and every time they want to get out of their seat for something. I don't have time to monitor such activity. In a small school or class setting such as you have out here, I again feel that the students will not generally abuse such a privilege. But, you as their teacher, will probably determine the degree of such movement about the classroom or throughout the building based upon

your level of tolerance. It becomes a matter of how much you can put up with.

**Flexibility**

There is a common saying, or belief that is shared by some individuals in these small villages in the Bristol Bay Area, and perhaps by other villagers in the state. It goes something like, "I don't make plans because they never work out"

Now that is what I call being flexible. Actually, I believe the phrase has more to do with the unpredictable weather conditions more than anything else. Many a well laid travel plan has been squashed by a sudden change in the weather. Of course, you realize, the only two ways in and out of these small villages are by plane or boat. There are no roads connecting these villages, for the most part.

If you are a non-native and grew up anywhere in the lower-48 states, you probably grew up and lived by a time schedule of some sort as I did. I won't bother to list these, as you can reflect back on your own lifestyle to understand what I mean.

Rural Native Alaskans also have timetables and schedules which affect and manage their lives, but, I would say they are much broader, wide ranging, and more flexible, probably tied more to the cycles of nature and the seasons than to the schedule of a 40-hour work week. Naturally, most of this is due to the fact that these small villages are mainly fishing communities. Very few people have year round jobs. It is not that they would not welcome more opportunities for year round employment, it is just the nature of the way of life in rural Alaska. The majority of the residents make their money in commercial fishing ventures in the summer months. They then have to budget their funds throughout the winter. Their abundant leisure time can be spent in a variety of ways, such as hunting, trapping, snow going, three wheeling, arts and craft work, card games, church and social get togethers, maintenance of homes and equipment, etc.

What I am saying is, it is a way of life that we, as non natives, are not accustomed to. It is a different way of life, not a better or worse way of life, just different from how you and I grew up.

You have to understand (as Dorothy did when she landed in Oz) you will be working and living under a somewhat different set of conditions, rules, and traditions. You should attempt to make a conscious effort to familiarize yourself with, and become sensitive to this new setting.

Things which worked well for you back home in your other school may or may not work well out here. If it does, stick with it, if it does not, let it go. Do not be so rigid and or inflexible.

Listen to what your students, parents, and other village members you meet, say. Some may not say much, but when they do speak, it is usually for a good reason. You have to attempt to see their point of view. What you think or feel is right, might very well be from your cultural point of view.

But it might not be looked upon in the same manner, in the village where you work and live.

You will stick your foot in your mouth many times as you learn to understand the local ways. As long as they are not major or serious misjudgments, the local people generally will be very tolerant if they feel you were sincere in your efforts.

### Personality/Attitude

First impressions are usually lasting ones, I have generally found, with the people in these small villages. So, chances are, you will know within a very short period of time, how you have been perceived by the students and adults in your community.

I cannot give you a magic recipe that will guarantee your acceptance in your particular community, as each village, I have found, does have its own unique characteristics. But, I feel I can make some general statements about your living and teaching situations that you might want to consider.

- Do not approach your new situation with the attitude that you know everything there is about living and teaching in rural Alaska, if you have never experienced it before. The local people will see through this right away. Do not be embarrassed or shy to ask someone for assistance or suggestions, or outright help. You will find the majority of the villagers are very sharing, kind, willing to help you get settled in and into the routine of rural living.
- Be willing to keep an open mind about situations as you get to know people and talk about various subjects. I doesn't mean you have to accept or agree with that person, or change your beliefs, but do not be too quick to ignore or disregard their opinions either.
- Patience is a quality you will need to try to develop more of, if you do not already have a high level. You will need it, as you try to understand why events are the way they are out here. You must not be too quick to make judgments about the rural lifestyle. You and I simply were not born and raised out here. We will inevitably compare the two lifestyles.

## *District Central Office and Other Support Personnel*

As I mentioned before, you, the teacher, are the most important person in the scheme of your local school situation. You are the one who will put in the most time and effort on a day to day basis. You, more than any other person or group of people, will determine the degree of success your students achieve during the school year.

However, there certainly are other contributing members to the school setting, which, depending on their effectiveness and commitment, can help or hinder your efforts to provide quality education to the students. Let us start at the top of the support personnel ladder and work our way down.

### District School Board

These people are responsible for the operation of the entire school district, of which your school may be just one of many. The members of this board are usually people who were born and raised in one of the villages, or have lived in the area for a considerable amount of time. I like to believe the people who are elected to serve on this board are committed to the purpose of helping provide the best possible education to the students in the area.

One distinct advantage of working for a small rural school district is, you get to know the board members somewhat better than in a larger school district, and they get to know you. Dedicated and committed board members will go out of their way to support and help a dedicated and committed teacher, because they will want that teacher to return year after year.

### Administration

One very nice advantage of teaching in a one teacher school is you do not have to answer directly to anyone on a daily basis. It is basically you and the students.

An administrator will fly out to your school several times during the school year. (3-10 times, depending upon the needs and concerns of your school.) If things are going smoothly, chances are you will not see much of your administrator. An effective administrator will get you answers to questions your local school advisory committee asks, to which you may not have the answers. He/she will see to it that parts, equipment, or supplies you need are ordered and delivered as quickly as possible. An effective administrator could possibly make the difference between a temporarily struggling teacher making it through the year successfully, or resigning his/her teaching position.

### Maintenance Personnel from Central Office

Unfortunately, these people sometimes get a bad rap, as you either love them or hate them. When things at your site are going smoothly, you could care less where the maintenance people are. But, just as soon as your furnace goes down, a water pipe freezes, or a sewer line backs up, you are on the phone demanding they drop what they are doing and get down here immediately. In the interim, you bad mouth them, wondering why they did not see this problem during the summer and fix it then.

Over the years, I have had pretty good luck and cooperation with the maintenance people in our district. But, you have to be patient with them and realize that they have other schools, projects, and emergencies to deal with besides yours. You must learn to handle as much of your maintenance problems as you can, locally, either yourself or with the assistance of your school custodian or members of the village. If it is an emergency that does require district maintenance personnel, be sure to give them as much information as you can, including the proper part numbers if it is a piece of equipment that has broken down. This will speed up the process of repairing the damage. But, be patient with these people as they try to do the best they can, given the vast possibilities of things that can go wrong with such a widespread school system.

### Itinerant District Librarian/Special Education Services/Itinerant Music & Art Teachers

It truly is a luxury having a district librarian come around once a month or so to make sure your library stays organized and functional. He/she can also recommend needed books, reference materials and/or periodicals that would make an important addition to your school library. He/she can even order it all for you.

Lake and Peninsula School District used to have itinerant art and music teachers that would travel to each school for about eight weeks each (one or two days per week). They would provide activities and experiences the

regular classroom teacher might not be qualified to teach. These two programs were generally well received by the students, and supported by the district overall. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, these programs had to be eliminated.

As a former special education itinerant teacher, I can speak about the quality of special education services delivered to these small rural schools from first hand experience. In my opinion, as admirable as the district's efforts are to provide quality and effective special education services to those needy students, there just is not enough of a budget to do the job properly. The rural school districts in Alaska do the best they can given the current dollar amounts. Itinerant special education teachers get stretched pretty thin trying to provide quality services to teachers and students. Some needy students could benefit from full time special education teachers, but due to the unrealistic costs of such a requirement, the student has to settle for substantially less. But, please keep in mind this is not so much a reflection upon the rural school districts' commitment to special education services, as it is a reflection of one of the negative consequences of living in a rural village in Alaska.

However, the Special Education staff of Lake and Peninsula School District was recently recognized by a national education organization for its quality of services delivered to the students in our district. This is due in large part, I believe, to the quality of the special education staff we currently have, headed by Ron Jones, and, also the fact that several of the special education staff members have been with the district for several years.

## Local School Committee

In my opinion, these people are the second most important element in contributing to an effective rural school. For the benefit of the students it is vital that the teacher and the local school advisory committee work together and get along. It is also vital for the teacher's benefit, as I can't imagine a more unpleasant working condition for a teacher than trying to work with an unsupportive school committee. If you ever lose the support of your local school committee, the best advice I could give you would be to finish up the school year and look for another place to teach. Do not ever teach in a village school where you are really not wanted. Go someplace where you are wanted.

Each village, as I have mentioned before, has its own unique characteristics; therefore, each local village school committee will function differently. Some will be quite active and will expect you to keep them informed of anything and everything concerning local school matters, and District wide matters and concerns. Others may trust your judgment and pretty much let you run the whole show. In the latter instance, meetings will be scheduled as needed, rather than on a monthly basis. But whatever type of local school committee you have in your village school, remember they are there for your benefit in helping you to effectively run the school, so use them and work with them.

## Parents

Parents are the third most important group of people in helping to create an effective rural school. It is a much more pleasant teaching environment when you have the support and backing of the parents of your students. By this I mean several things:

- Making sure their children are in bed at a decent hour on school nights.
- Keeping their children enrolled in school on a regular basis.
- Making sure their children do their homework.
- Supporting the teacher in any possible disciplinary measures against their child.
- Attending parent/teacher conferences as felt needed.
- Taking the time to work with their children at home on learning and other educational activities.

Just as you may not get along with every student in your school, so too, you may not have the full support of every parent in your village, for whatever reasons. You should not be too concerned about this until you begin to lose the support of the majority of your parents. Then, it is most likely time to move on to another village school.

## Educational Background

I am not convinced that having a masters degree or doctoral degree will necessarily make you a more effective teacher in a small rural school. I suppose it could not hurt. But I believe a generalist would be at more of an advantage than a specialist. A generalist would be a teacher who has basic training in the general subject areas, whether it be a bachelors or masters degree, and also some skill or competence in music (perhaps can play an instrument or who has a good singing voice), art (perhaps is an amateur painter or has other artistic interests), and some training or experience in drama activities and programs. This overall general competence would be a big advantage in a one teacher school, providing that the teacher had the self confidence and commitment to go along with those varied skills.

In my ten years of teaching I have met only one teacher who possessed all of these skills, and more. I am sure she would not mind me using her real name—Helen Bowers. I could write a whole booklet on her alone, so I will try to keep this brief.

Helen has a masters degree in Elementary Education, an endorsement in Reading, and also one in Special Education. She can play the piano, sing and even yodel. She can paint and draw very well. She is also an excellent dancer. Also, anyone who ever met Helen would never accuse her of lacking self-confidence or commitment. She spent five years with our district. The first two years she was an itinerant reading specialist, and the last three years she taught in Ivanof Bay, at a one-teacher school in

the southern half of the district and the most isolated of our fourteen village schools. I believe Helen would agree with me that overall, possessing a wide variety of educational skills, training and competencies would better serve the teacher in a small multi graded school than an advanced degree in one particular field.

This does not mean you should rule out teaching in this type of setting if you do not possess a variety of skills. You will find these students enjoy experimenting with paints, crayons, and any other type of art medium. Even if you can not carry a tune (like me) the students still like to sing along to children's records and tapes.

Putting together a Christmas program is always a challenge, especially if you only have a few older students who can read the script and memorize the lines. You will often have to rewrite a lot of Christmas plays to fit the number of actors you have to work with. In some instances, you will have to resort to drastic measures and write your own Christmas plays. But, it can be done, as Helen would attest to. Again, it all goes back to having the self-confidence and commitment to get the job done. Just keep in mind, there will be no other staff members around to help you so you have to plan ahead and give yourself plenty of lead time to prepare for those special occasions. You will also find that some of the parents and your local school committee will assist you if you ask them, as they understand their teacher may not be "good" at everything. They will support you if you are willing to put forth the effort.

### A Varied Personal Background

I suppose having ascended a 15,000 foot mountain, kayaked the major South American Waterways, hot air ballooned across three states, parachuted from 10,000 feet, gone on a safari in deepest Africa, or backpacked along the Great Wall of China would qualify you as possessing a varied personal background. But these are not, in my opinion, prerequisites for being an effective teacher in a rural setting.

It would certainly have done wonders for your self-confidence. Commitment was definitely called for in such tasks. But the average, ultra conservative, low profile, middle of the road teacher can still do an exemplary job out here. There are many other avenues for acquiring self-confidence and commitment. You will not want to rely solely on your previous achievements to undertake the task and responsibility you will have out here in a small multi- graded school setting. You will be amazed at what you can do, and how successful you can become once you are presented with the challenge.

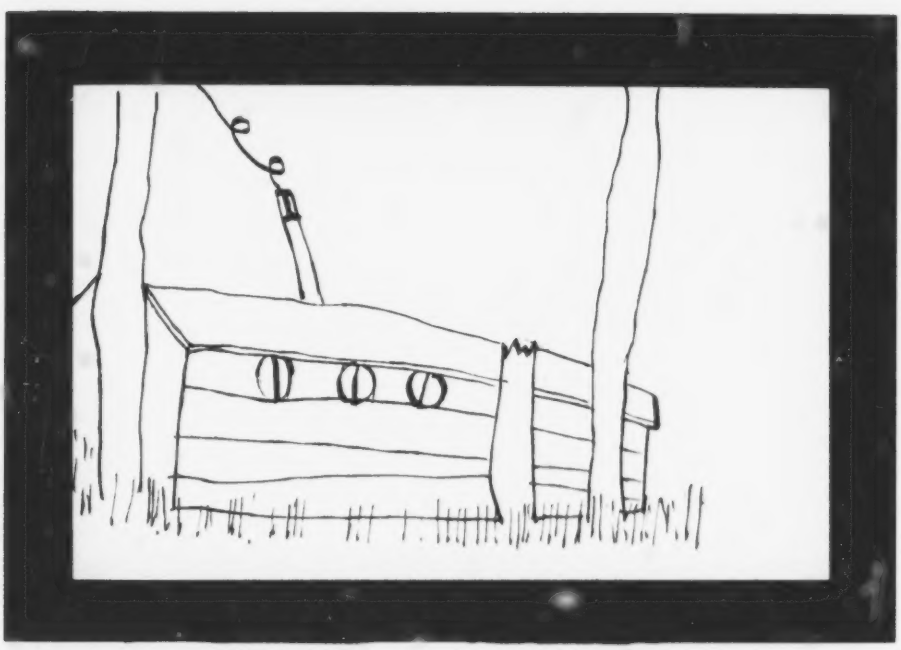
### Male or Female

I have deliberately listed this quality, not because I am a male chauvinist. In my years of living and teaching in rural Alaska, I believe this state is still primarily a sexist state. By that, I mean there are still definite identifiable male and female roles that are tradition in rural Alaska. I believe this is due to the relatively demanding environment in which

these people exist. All have their roles, tasks, and functions to fulfill. This is not to say that women in Alaska are looked upon as second class people. I have seen many village women perform tasks and work in jobs that are physically demanding, of high skill, and in some instances, dangerous or risky.

However, being a male or female does not give you any advantage in teaching in a small rural school in Alaska. Do not let your gender discourage you in any way. Again, I only have to refer you back to Helen. She was just as capable, and in many ways, more capable than many males, in undertaking the role of Principal/Teacher. No one particular sex holds a monopoly, or has a decided advantage in successfully teaching in rural Alaskan village schools.

Now, for the ranking of these qualities in order from highest priority to the least: simply refer back to the beginning of this chapter. They are already ranked, just as I wrote and discussed them. Self-confidence and commitment are the top two most important qualities for being an effective teacher in a small rural school setting. A varied personal background and gender are the least significant qualities, in my opinion.



# Part Two

# How to Get Along in the Community and Build Community Relationships

This may seem rather unusual, but you really do not have to **do** very much to get along with the people in your local community. It is primarily what you **don't do** that could make the difference. Let me discuss a few topics and areas of concern that, hopefully, will clarify what I mean by this.

## Visiting

As you would expect in a small relatively isolated village, there is a great deal of informal socializing. It is important that you try to visit and socialize once in a while, especially your first year in the village. The community members do want to get to know you on a more personal level, than just as a teacher.

Over the years, I have found that you should make the initial move and go visit the people and their homes. But, be prepared to drink several cups of coffee, tea, or juice, and snack on some freshly baked food, or even join them for lunch or supper. I can't remember when I visited someone and was not offered something to eat or drink. As I mentioned in Part One, you will find most of the community members to be very kind, gracious, and sharing individuals.

As I mentioned several times, each village is somewhat different in its make-up and character. I became aware of this when I was an itinerant teacher. There were some villages I looked forward to visiting, and others I did not necessarily enjoy; but that was just a matter of personal interest or taste. Other itinerant teachers probably had their particular favorites.

What I am about to say may not seem very flattering or positive, but I feel it is important to mention, because it could save you from making an honest mistake, or or help to avoid personal controversy. I believe I am fairly accurate in what I am going to say as I experienced it when I was an itinerant teacher.

If your are a single teacher, you have to be somewhat extra careful about who or when you go visiting, especially during your first few months in that village. There were some villages where I did not go visiting many families' homes because a new single man in town was looked upon by some people as a threat or competition for their women, or it was not considered the proper thing to do. I found many husbands to be quite possessive of their wives, and vice-versa. I will mention one incident as an example of how possessive one man was.

When I was an itinerant teacher, I had to call the central office to let them know when I was ready to move on to the next village school, as I had no set schedule. They would send a plane down to move me to the next site. During those early years, there was only one phone for the entire village. This phone was usually located in the village community hall, and a local person was hired by the village to log all calls made on the phone and to collect the time and charges for the calls.

I was working in one of our smaller village schools. I had completed my work there and went down to the community hall to use the phone to have a plane sent down for me. This was my first visit to this village so I had not met any of the local people yet. I walked into the community hall and there was a young lady taking care of the phone; no one else was in the building except her and me. I introduced myself as a teacher with our school district and proceeded to use the phone.

After you have hung up from completing your call, you have to wait for the operator to call back with your time and charges so you can pay the phone attendant. While I was waiting for the operator to call back, the phone attendant and I talked a bit. Suddenly the door to the hall burst open and in stomped this young man, very upset and angry. He bellowed out, "What the hell is going on here?" I responded with my name and that I worked with the school district and was calling central office on school business. I extended my hand for a greeting and he responded, "Oh yeah...well I'm this girl's boyfriend and don't you forget it!!" I responded that was nice, but I just came to use the phone. Fortunately for me, the operator called back with my time and charges, so I paid for my call and left the loving couple alone.

Unfortunately, the weather turned lousy and I was not able to get out that day. This meant I had to go back to the community hall the next day to make another call to the central office. I dreaded the thought, but down I went again. When I walked through the door this time, there was the phone attendant, and there he was with one of those contented, satisfied grins on his face that says, "Gotcha!" I made the call without incident, but this time I did not strike up a conversation with either person.

The plane finally made it in the next day. As the pilot was unloading freight for the village, I took one last look around before stepping into the plane. As I glanced over to the community hall, there he was standing in the open doorway looking in my direction. I'd like to think he was checking to see how much freight or mail sacks came in, or if anyone he knew was getting off the plane, but I don't think that is what was going through his mind.

In another incident, I recall visiting one family when I was an itinerant teacher, and the husband was not home; only the wife and two children. I stayed about fifteen minutes. I noticed, upon leaving, that the woman had left the inside door open the entire time (most of these homes have an arctic entry way). I thought this was unusual as it was winter. I later found out that this woman always does this when a male comes to the house and her husband is not at home. This may not have been an entire

village tradition, but it was this particular woman's tradition. In other villages this was not the case. There did not seem to be any problem with visiting when the husband was not home.

This might also apply to a single female teacher visiting a family when the wife is not at home. There just seems to be this understanding, or proper respect, in some villages.

I once overheard two women talking. One woman was inviting the other (who was from another village and was only going to be in town for a few hours) to come to her house for coffee and a visit. The woman made the comment that "there are not any more men over there now, they have all left." I knew both women fairly well and I wanted to ask what difference it would make if there were still men over there, as both women were married. (I did not ask, because this is a perfect example of what I referred to in Part One about putting your foot in your mouth.) I have concluded that for this particular woman, who offered the invitation, it would not be proper to bring her friend over to her house with several men sitting at the kitchen table. You may not find this to be the case in your particular village, but I did want to make you aware of this as it is a good example of what I was referring to in Part One, under "Flexibility", when I mentioned that you will be working and living under a different set of conditions, rules, and traditions. You may come across this attitude in some circumstances.

## Socializing

My last couple of years in Pilot Point, I was affectionately (I hope?) referred to by some as "The Hermit on the Hill." It was because I did not get out and around as much as in previous years. It had nothing to do with not liking any particular group of people any less than before, or because I was acing stuck-up. It is basically that I am sort of a loner. I seem to enjoy being by myself, enjoying the peace and solitude of an evening or a weekend. I prefer to do things alone. I think in many ways, it is one of the main reasons I enjoy being in a small one-teacher school. I do not have to worry about offending or alienating any staff members.

I believe that nickname would apply even more so here in Egegik. One advantage I had when I came to teach here two years ago was that I already knew many people from my earlier years as an itinerant teacher. So, I felt very comfortable about the community and its people. I do not do very much socializing here. I pretty much concentrate on teaching and taking care of the school routine. It has nothing to do with the people here, as they are some of the kindest and most generous people I have had the pleasure of knowing. I have had dinner at several peoples' homes, and the local school committee and village members get together at the school for a monthly potluck and a movie. So, I do get to socialize with some community members. I know that some wish I would try to get out and around and become more visible in the community. I have no excuses for this other than what I mentioned earlier; I just seem to prefer being alone. The local school committee and parents have not held this against me because I have their respect as a committed teacher.

(Remember what I said in Part One about commitment and why you are primarily here?)

So, you do not have to be a social animal to be accepted by the local community members. As long as the parents know that you are doing the job in the classroom, they will be more than willing to put up with your reclusiveness for student progress and effective teaching.

## Differences of Opinion/Beliefs

As you make friends and acquaintances in the village, you will no doubt, sooner or later, touch upon a topic or subject area where you and that person will differ in opinion. Having differing opinions, and each arguing or presenting their reasons for them, does provide for meaningful exchange of thoughts; and chances are, each can respect the other's opinion. However, when such a conversation takes place between two individuals who are meeting for the first time, problems may arise. I want to tell you about a conversation that took place between a first year teacher in our district and a village council president.

This first year high school teacher went to talk to the council president about teaching outboard motor repairs. The local man had taught this class to high school students several times in previous years and was going to teach it again. This local man is an accomplished fisherman and obviously has lifelong practical experience in maintaining an outboard motor. The two began talking about how the class should be taught. The local man felt the best way to teach the class was to show the students what to look for when an outboard motor breaks down (i.e., check the gas, oil level, spark plug, other various parts and connections—depending on the nature of the problem.) The first year teacher felt strongly that theory should be taught to the students. He felt that if the students knew exactly how an outboard motor operated and functioned, and all the proper names for the various parts and systems, they could better identify what the nature of the problem was. (Not knowing the first thing about an outboard motor, I think both methods sound pretty good—but then again, what do I know?)

Both stood firm in their beliefs as to the best way of teaching this class. One way was based upon classroom knowledge and course work; the other was based upon life experience and occupation.

Needless to say, the local man refused to teach the class that year. The first year teacher had made a serious mistake. He made the mistake of getting off on the wrong foot with one of the most influential men in the village. This does not mean the teacher should have buckled under and changed his belief in how that class should have been taught. Rather, he did not appear to respect this local man's opinion and method on this topic. In other words, it was a slap in the face from an outsider, on how to best repair a piece of equipment that this local man had been using and repairing most of his life. (This gets back to what I mentioned in Part One about trying to look at things from the local cultural point of view).

I have no doubt that the two men(and the students) could have learned something from each other. The teacher had lost this man's respect before he ever had a chance to earn it. This first year teacher was simply too set in his ways and too inflexible. He never made it through the entire school year.

This type of conversation, argument, or disagreement probably could have taken place half-way through the school year when the two men would have, by that time, probably been better acquainted and no lasting ill feelings would have developed.

The point I am trying to make here is you do not have to necessarily sacrifice or compromise your own personal beliefs in order to get along with, or be accepted by, the community. But, you might want to temper your opinions and beliefs somewhat, and not impose them the very first opportunity you have. Get to know the individuals on a more personal basis first.

## Hunting/Trapping

Another area of concern that I want to mention briefly, as it has caused problems for some teachers in our district in the past, has to do with hunting and trapping. Obviously, rural Alaska is a haven for the adventuresome, outdoors type of person, especially in these two areas.

It is very important that you follow and observe the seasons, and bag limits in your area. But, from my observations, experiences, and from the misfortunes of some other teachers, this may not be enough. Even though you may have every legal right to hunt and trap once you have met the residency requirements, you may find that there are certain species that you do not want to go after aggressively.

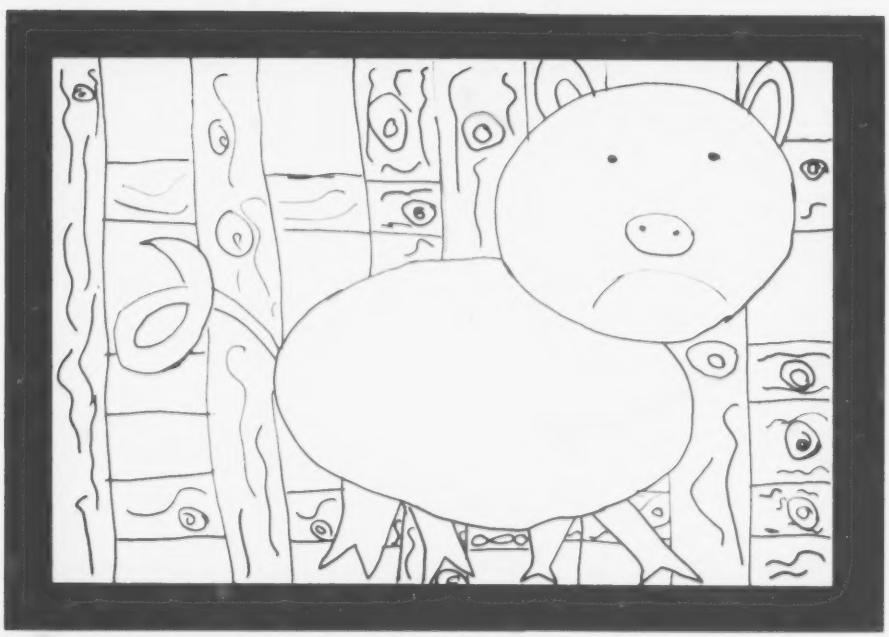
In some parts of our district, bear hunting by a teacher (especially a first year teacher) is frowned upon, particularly if the teacher goes out on his/her own without a local person along. Outside big game hunters do come into this area on occasion, and with the guidance of an experienced local hunter (usually for a fee), can take a bear. But, generally speaking, and for whatever reason, in some villages the shooting of bears by non-natives is not looked upon favorably. In some villages this may not be a problem. So, be extra careful if you are an enthusiastic hunter. Check with the local people concerning their feelings and attitudes about teachers and non-natives hunting particular species of game. It could save you from making an honest mistake and drawing any unnecessary ill feelings toward you.

The same thing applies to trapping. There may be some animals that the local village members have no qualms about a teacher or non-native setting out traps for. But other species may be thought of as reserved for local natives only, such as lynx, wolves, or wolverines. This could be due to the small number of such animals in the area, and therefore, a higher price for any pelts taken. Also, local residents may need the extra income that such trapping may take in, more than a teacher might.

Also, if you do plan to trap, be sure to check with other local trappers before you set out any, as you may inadvertently set out traps on someone's traditional grounds that they have been using long before you ever came to that village. This would certainly cause ill feelings between you and the local community members.

In my opinion, no matter how much you might want to hunt or trap a particular species of animal in that area, and no matter how legal it might be for you to do so; if you receive a consensus of opinion from the local people that doing so would be frowned upon, then I would think twice before I proceeded to do so.

As in any community, all members do not get along with each other all the time. So, do not expect to please and get along with each and every community member. No matter how long you teach in one of these rural villages, no matter how well you may be liked, respected, or even loved, the bottom line is, you will always be an "outsider." Please do not take this as a put down or an insult or with any type of negative connotations. It is simply a fact. You and I were not born and raised in these villages or in this culture. We will never truly understand and fully comprehend the people and students we live and work with, but that does not mean we cannot be effective teachers of these students and develop close friendships and ties with some of the local people we meet.



## Drugs/Alcohol

This is another area of concern that might not be very flattering, or easy to write about, but I feel it is important to mention for any teacher thinking or considering living and teaching in rural Alaska. Drugs and alcohol unfortunately have penetrated the rural areas of this state. Like any other community in the United States, there are individuals in these villages, natives and non-natives, who abuse them.

As you know, there are many reasons why individuals use drugs and alcohol. I will not bother to list them. I do believe, however, that some of the reasons adults in these small, relatively isolated villages may abuse drugs and alcohol are the following:

- Lack of year round, full time job employment.
- Long winter months which may lead to unusual levels of stress or depression.
- Lack of engaging in other, more constructive activities.
- Sheer boredom, too much time on some people's hands.
- A poor fishing season, which does not provide adequate income to sustain families through the winter and may lead to unusual levels of stress and tensions.
- Unawareness of the risks and or dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

I certainly have made my share of blunders as regards alcohol and drinking with some local community members. Some, I am too embarrassed to write down in this booklet for you to read. But, I will say, if you are a non-drinker and do not take drugs, stay that way. Stick to your convictions and beliefs in this matter.

If you do drink or take drugs, then I would strongly recommend you refrain from doing so while you are in the village, or if you do so, use discretion. Drink only with those individuals you completely trust or are close friends. It is very difficult to keep secrets in these small communities. Everyone knows everyone else's business.

You will find that there is not much of what you and I would refer to as social drinking. By that I mean, having a couple of beers or drinks in the evening or sharing a few drinks among friends or acquaintances and then saving the rest for another time. Unfortunately, the style of drinking you will find out here is more a mass consumption. If an individual purchases two cases of beer, then that beer will be consumed that day, or night. There won't be much, if any, left the next day. This is why it is difficult to drink with some of the community members. You may have a couple of bottles of vodka, whiskey, or wine that you break out for your guests. However, your company may not leave until those bottles are emptied, no matter how long it takes. This can cause problems for you. Tensions may begin to run high as you try to get your guests to leave.

Arguments may break out among your guests, and perhaps, even physical attacks may occur between you or among your guests.

This may is a style of drinking to which you are not be accustomed. Please do not think that all local community members drink this way, or that all local community members drink, because this is simply not true. You will find there are many individuals with whom you can share a social drink or two. You will also find may individuals who do not drink at all. There are some villages that are completely dry and have taken the necessary steps to make them that way. Other villages are attempting to deal with the problem, as they are beginning to realize that substance abuse is negatively affecting the lives of their community members.

Whether you like it or not, whatever you do in your village community on a personal or professional basis, is a reflection of, or on, the school district which that village school is a part of. This is one of the prices you pay for living and working out here. This is why I stated in Part One that you are the most important element in your school setting. Nobody will put in more time and effort at your school site, nor will be judged more critically as to the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness of your village school.

Another negative factor of drinking with local community members is when you drink with some of the parents of your students. Many of these village homes are relatively small, and children do not always have their own rooms to go and spend the evenings in when adults are drinking in their home. If you are drinking at one of your students' homes, and you have too much to drink, your student may see you in this condition and word of this can quickly spread throughout the community. Even if you have only one or two drinks while there, your student may still tell others that you were at their house last night drinking. The assumption by other community members may be that if you were drinking, you must have gotten drunk. You could lose the respect of your students and other community members.

So, based upon personal experience and experiences other teachers had, my advice to you would be:

- If you do not drink or take drugs, do not start.
- If you do drink or take drugs, refrain from doing so while in your village.
- If you are a social drinker, make sure you only drink with other social drinkers in your community.
- Do not drink or take drugs in front of your students.
- Do not drink or take drugs with parents of your students.
- Do not give alcohol to community members that you are not close to, as you will be approached by others who wish to borrow from you.

# Part Three

# But How Do I Teach All Those Grade Levels and Subjects?

I believe this is one of the most important questions all teachers in a small one or two teacher school ask themselves when they first arrive, and perhaps one that other teachers, considering teaching in this type of setting, might also ask. Some prospective teachers, who perhaps would make excellent teachers in rural Alaska, might hesitate making the choice to come and work in a small school, because they do not feel they could effectively teach all those different grade levels and subject areas.

Teaching in a K-8, K-12, or other multigraded setting certainly may be initially more of a challenge than if you only have one grade to be responsible for. Again, I have to say, there is no one effective way to teach in this type of school setting, as I firmly believe no two teachers teach exactly the same way. Each teacher has their own strengths and weaknesses, and you must realize you may not be completely competent or comfortable teaching every subject area or grade level. As I mentioned before, I have only met one teacher in my years of teaching in this district that came close to being truly qualified and competent to teach in a one teacher school—Helen Bowers. But, I am sure if you could talk to Helen, even she would mention some areas where she felt she had some difficulties.

I will, however, give you some suggestions regarding techniques, strategies, and class management that seem to have worked quite well for me over the years in working with a large span of grades and levels of subject areas.

## Schedule

Try to stick to a regular, consistent daily and weekly class schedule and you will find the students will automatically switch over to the next subject area. In my daily routine, for example, my students have learned the following:

> After the pledge to the flag, the students get out their math books. But the kindergartners and some of the other younger students know that before they get out their math books, they have to first study the set of addition, subtraction, multiplication or division flash cards they are currently working on. They have learned they study these cards for a few minutes, then bring them up to me for a quick drill. Only then, do they get out their math books.

The students have also learned that ten o'clock is spelling time. They do not always need me to tell them to put away their math books and get out their spelling books. They also know that they work in their spelling

books until I say "Let's get ready for recess..." After morning recess is over, they know it is reading time until I say "Let's get ready for lunch..."

After lunch, they know it is time to break out their science books, except if it is Thursday. On Thursday, they know we have P.E. after lunch. At 1:30 they have learned it is time to switch over to their English books unless it is Tuesday or Thursday. They know on these days it is time to work on their writing assignments and stories. They will work on their English assignments or on their writing assignments until I say "let's get ready for recess..." After recess, it is social studies and, of course, they all know what they are going to do on Friday after lunch..."ART!!"

So, if you can keep to some kind of consistent schedule, you will find your students will monitor themselves to a great extent, and this will help you cut down on your verbal directives and help keep things moving smoothly along.

### Varying Schedule

Now, please don't think I keep to this type of daily schedule 180 days, come rain or shine. I don't think either my students or I could stand this much consistency. I do vary it somewhat, depending upon the time of year, holidays, the students' interests, and yes, even my interests. Let me explain what I mean by these.

### The Time of the Year

I find it beneficial to stick to a consistent schedule during the beginning of the school year. This allows the students to become familiar with the daily and weekly routine of school, especially for any new students, such as kindergartners or transfer students. I also try to stick to a consistent schedule during the winter months, or those months when the weather is not suitable for doing much of anything outdoors. December, January, February and March are usually fairly cold months here in the Bristol Bay area—generally too cold or overcast for the students to want to venture outdoors for a hike or extra P.E. activities. I will work the students hard during these months, so when the nice warm spring weather rolls around, I can let up on them, and extend their recess time, or lunch break, and do some activities outside that we couldn't do otherwise. (Pilot Point, Egegik, and a few other schools in our district do not have new school facilities. These schools are the old Bureau of Indian Affairs structures built back in the 1940's and 50's. There are no gym facilities for indoor P.E. and recreational activities in these types of schools.)

### Holidays

As in any other school, these students enjoy the holidays and look forward to any celebration of them. This will naturally call for varying the schedule. Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter usually mean more art activities, evening programs, school parties, and rehearsals for school plays. Obviously, this means you may not do as much formal teaching as you normally would.

In these small villages, you will generally find the annual school Christmas program is one of the social highlights of the year. Usually you will have the major task of putting it together. As I mentioned earlier, you will want to give yourself plenty of time to prepare for this—to make sure the students have enough practice and rehearsal time, to set up the stage, and make sure you have enough time to order and receive supplies you will need for the program. This particular holiday will be the time in the school year where you will vary your regular schedule the most.

The village people generally expect some kind of school Christmas program, so you simply do the best you can and take whatever amount of time is necessary to prepare something. As I mentioned before, the most difficult problem you will have in putting together a Christmas program is finding a play that matches up with the number of capable students you have available, who can read and memorize lines. But, it can be done, and the parents and other village community members are usually very grateful for your efforts.

### Student Interests

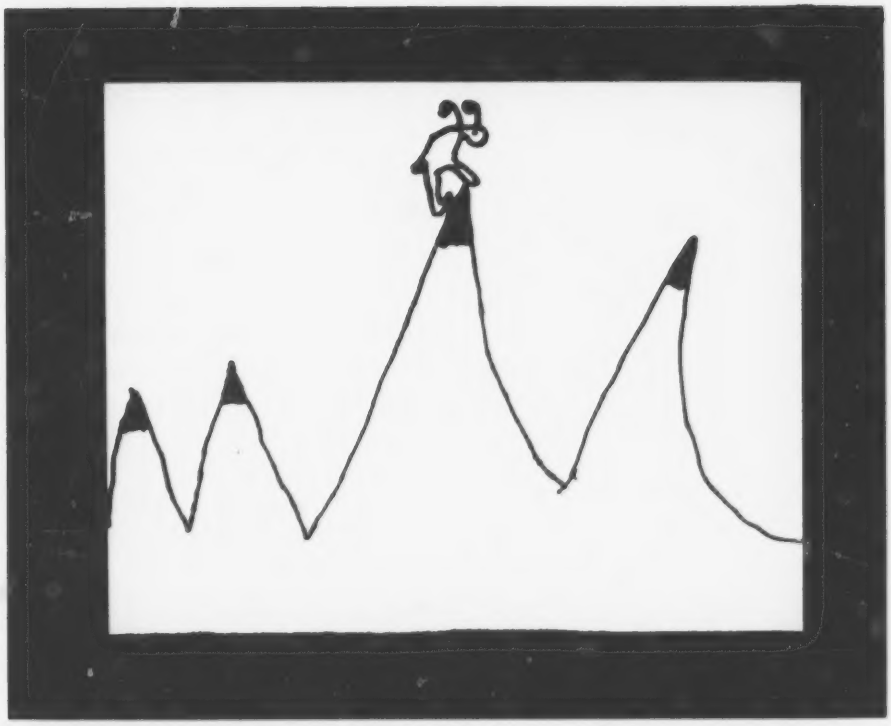
This may also apply to the time of the year, but I'll call these examples student interests. When the conditions are right, I usually vary my schedule to allow the students to go ice skating as part of our P.E. activities. This, of course, is with the local school committee and the parents' consent. I have never let a winter go by without at least one good old-fashioned snowball fight, or snowman or snow fort construction. In Pilot Point School, we had cross country skis for the students. Naturally, we had to take advantage of those few winter days when the conditions were right to use them.

No lesson plan I've ever written was considered absolute or unalterable. If I write a lesson plan for one group of students in reading, for example, and one of those students is absent on the day I planned to do that lesson, many times I have held off on that lesson and reassigned a more independent type of lesson for that group. This is because I want to try and keep that group together as much as possible. Now, if I know that student is going to be out of school for several days, then I will go ahead with the lesson as planned. But, a one or two-day delay is not going to make a major difference in their progress.

Sometimes, I may pick up that a student is having a personal problem of some kind. Perhaps he/she is having a problem at home, or a member of their family is having a problems which is affecting the student, or that student is just a little fatigued or bored with a particular subject area. If I feel it would be in the student's best interest to abandon the particular lesson I had planned, and assign the student something else, I will. That scheduled lesson can wait another day or two.

### Teacher Interest (or lack of interest)

Administrators, parents, and/or local school committee members may not like to hear this, but there are times when I may not necessarily be at my best for various reasons. Perhaps I am beginning to come down with a cold or the flu; perhaps I didn't get a good night's sleep, or I may be temporarily feeling down in the dumps about some personal thing in my life. It may not warrant having a substitute teacher fill in for me, but it may be enough of a problem that I may vary my planned schedule until I am feeling up to resuming the normal school routine. I have always taken great pride in trying to stay healthy enough to teach day in and day out. But, even teachers have their ups and downs now and then.



## Individualized Instruction

In a school setting where you have a span of grades K-8 or K-12, you obviously do very little class instruction. A good portion of each student's daily work is on an individualized basis. You will have small groups, such as in reading, spelling, or social studies. But generally speaking, your students will be progressing along at their own individual pace even though some students will be in the same level texts. Some examples:

Here in Egegik, I have three students who are in the same basal reading text. One of the students is an excellent reader and doesn't like to read the story orally with the group, as the pace is too slow for her. So, once I've introduced the new vocabulary words for the story, that student returns to her desk to read the story silently and answers the questions by herself. The other two students remain with me and we read the story orally. This allows that one student to at least progress through the lesson at her own pace and not have reading become a dreaded or unpleasant subject for her.

In the area of math, I happen to have an exceptionally bright group of kindergartners. They are all at different levels. One has even started working in the third grade math book. It is not because I am such a fantastic teacher, but rather this particular student masters most of the skills so quickly she doesn't need a lot of drill and practice for review. It wouldn't be fair to keep any of these three students together as a group in math because they each learn and master the basic skills at different speeds. This certainly requires more effort and time on my part to keep them challenged and moving along, but it is important to keep each of these students interested in math and looking forward to learning new skills.

I have a third grade and a sixth grade student who, in addition to their grade level math books, are also working part-time in a ninth grade algebra book, as they need more challenging and stimulating work than what is in their current grade level text.

You may find some older students will only ask for your assistance when they are having difficulty. Others will appear to be constantly in need of assistance as they are afraid of trying a task on their own and making a mistake. And, of course, the younger students will need a lot of you direct instruction to move them through their lessons.

## Small Group Instruction

Having small groups of students working together and progressing through the same texts will be as close as you come to teaching an entire class. The majority of the time, I group my students together according to ability level, rather than grade level. There is no point giving a fourth grade student fourth grade text books if that student is only functioning at the third grade level, or lower. The opposite holds true as well.

Students will vary in strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects. Perhaps your fourth grade student will be capable of working in the

fourth grade Reading, Spelling, and English books, but only in a second or third grade math book or third grade Science or Social Studies book, then that is where you should place that student.

There is one word of caution I want to mention about placing students according to ability level, rather than grade level. In these small schools, you often have several brothers and sisters in the same classroom. It may happen that a younger sibling is extremely bright and could possibly progress to the same ability level as their older sibling. Even though you could conceivably teach those two in the same level book, I would not recommend it. The older sibling's self-esteem could be devastated by this, not only in school, but also at home. I would suggest putting the older student in a higher level textbook than the younger student, while providing the older student with supplementary materials and instruction. The convenience you would have just isn't worth the risk for that student.

## Informal Assessment

In order to set students up with the appropriate-level books and materials, you must first know the ability levels of your students. The results from previous standardized test scores will give you some clue, but do not rely solely upon those scores.

The most effective means of finding out what your students know and don't know is to do some brief informal assessments of your own with each student. Try to do this during the first week or two of the school year. Some examples:

### Math

Put together a "test package" of flash cards, one set for each of the four basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Then simply call up your students one at a time and see if they can mentally compute these. Obviously, if a student can't successfully compute the basic addition and subtraction facts, there is no need to test that student on the multiplication or division cards. Make a note of these on each student.

Next, make up, or find some ready-made sheets which will test the students' ability to compute problems in the four basic operations. Of course, you will want to make sure these problems progress in a hierarchy of level of difficulty.

With kindergarten, first, and second grade students, you will also want to test for number readiness. Can they orally count in sequence? Can they identify the numbers 1 - 20, 1 - 50, 1 - 100? Can they identify the missing number in a sequence of numbers, etc.

Continue informally testing your students in the basic skills of math, until you have a pretty good profile of each student's strengths and weaknesses. This will help you better determine the grade level text book in which to place your students.

### Reading/Reading Readiness

With your kindergarten and first grade students, find out if they can recite the alphabet– if they can identify the letters in order, at random. See if they can associate the correct sound with the letter. When presented a picture, can they give you the first sound that picture begins with? Can they give you the last sound? Find out if they can give you another word that rhymes with that picture. Have some basic sight word cards available, and find out if they can read any of these. This will give you a good understanding of where these younger students are in their reading development.

With the older students, administer the placement test which accompanies most basal reading series, to double check that students are properly placed, and don't need to review or skip a level. Listen to your students read orally for signs of fluency, their pauses at periods and commas, and their inflections. Do some students have particular problems with short vowel sounds, long vowel patterns, contractions, multi-syllable words, etc? Only then can you appropriately place students in the correct level reading text.

### Spelling/Language/Writing Skills

About the easiest way to quickly assess a student's skills in these areas is to give them a writing assignment. You can then look for spelling error patterns, capitalization and punctuation errors, and their manuscript or cursive writing ability. No one will know your students better than you in your school or classroom. No one will be able to determine what is in their best interests as far as their school work is concerned, than you. Make decisions on your students behalf, and be willing to accept the consequences, either positive or negative, of those decisions. You are the one who will be working with those students day after day, and hopefully, year after year.

### Supplementary Materials

A wide variety of supplementary materials is necessary when teaching in a multigraded school or classroom. In a K-8 setting for example, it is possible to have as many as six reading levels to teach. It is just not effective to attempt manage six basal reading groups or levels at the same time. Depending on your students' abilities, you will find that about three basal reading levels or groups per session will be a manageable number. So, what do I have the other three groups or levels of students do for reading that session?

There is an infinite supply of good quality, instructive, supplementary reading materials available on the market today. I will tell you what I use as an example of how to assign your students more independent reading assignments so you can devote some quality time and instruction to those students you plan to work directly with, on any particular day.

## Reading

Barnell/Loft has an excellent series of reading booklets called The Specific Skills Series. Each booklet covers a specific skills area, i.e., Getting the Main Idea, Getting the Facts, Working With Sounds, Drawing Conclusions, etc. The grade levels span from 1-12. In Egegik, all my students work in these booklets. I would recommend you place your students one level below their instructional level, to get them off on a successful note.

Of course, SRA still produces excellent supplementary reading materials. I also use these. Milliken produces a reading comprehension series of disks for the computer, beginning with about third grade reading ability, and progressing through the high school level. This program also keeps track of each student;'s grade and progress. Come the end of each quarter, I can obtain these results, and record them in my grade book. I have used these in Pilot Point, and continue to use them here in Egegik. And there is nothing wrong with having a student, or two, read a library book during part of their reading period once in a while.

For the younger students, besides those levels of the Specific Skills Series that I can use, I also have read-along books/cassettes, or books/records that I can use with my K-1 or K-2 students. I also like the DLM (Developmental Learning Materials) Auditory and Visual Perception materials produced by American Guidance Service Company.

So, I have about three or four sources of supplementary materials that I can sign students for independent reading work. This not only allows for better management of the classroom, but as I said, it allows me to concentrate without a lot of interruptions on two or three groups for direct instruction.

## Math

Milliken also produces an excellent computer program in math (appropriately called Milliken Math) which I use in Egegik School. It covers the four basic operations, plus fractions, decimals, percents, integers, and laws of arithmetic. I generally run two or three students through some of these lessons each math period. Like the reading series, this program also keeps track of each student's progress and allows the student to move on to the next higher level when they have successfully mastered the previous level.

Of course, you will need to have a variety of manipulative materials for your younger students to work with to help them visualize certain math concepts.

I also use Allyn and Bacon's Series of Fraction and Decimal booklets to give some of my students a more concentrated exposure in these skill areas. I am a firm believer in students mastering their basic facts in addition and subtraction before introducing larger two and three digit numbers, or carrying or borrowing. So, I have several sets of flashcards available with which to drill my younger students. The same goes for

multiplication; have your students memorize those times tables cold before exposing them to more difficult multiplication problems.

### Language Arts

Milliken also produces computer material in this area–spelling, grammar, punctuation, alphabetizing.

Addison-Wesley produces a series of language arts and vocabulary worksheets/cassettes called The Target Series, which students can progress through independently. I also like Curriculum Associates materials (although these are not so much for use as independent materials, as they are for direct supplemental instructional use).

So, basically, make sure you have a good source and supply of supplementary materials available for students to work through independently, to leave you free to work directly with a few students or groups of students. Don't try to teach new material to every student at once, or have every student in their standard textbook or basal series at once, as it is too chaotic to expect to do an effective job. Otherwise, you will be doing more crowd control than any kind of meaningful instruction.

### Student Tutors

This is one concept that I tried not to use—whereby older students would work with or assist younger students in a particular subject or skill area. I always took the attitude that teaching the students was my responsibility and my area of expertise, and the student's role was to learn from me.

But here in Egegik, I have found myself allowing more of the older students an opportunity to work with,or assist the younger students in some of their lessons, particularly when that older student has completed his/her assignment in a particular subject. This has naturally evolved, as you might imagine, where you have such a wide span of ages and grades of students seated in the same classroom. Often I am involved with a group of students on a particular lesson and I just can't drop what I am doing, or be constantly interrupted to help other students who may very well need some assistance. So, they naturally go to an older student for help. What I always find to be satisfying and refreshing is to see a seventh or eighth grade student, who is diligently working on an assignment, take the time to be interrupted from his/her train of thought to stop and help a younger student.

Especially in this type of school setting, you can take advantage of older students tutoring and assisting younger students, and having those student enjoy it. I just happen to have one third grade student who wants to be a teacher when she grows up, so she is more than willing to offer to work with any student I might want to receive extra help. Don't hesitate to use this resource.

## Free Time

One of my most often used phrases in my directives to students is..."You can do something quietly at your desk now." By that I mean,the student has completed an assignment, and there isn't enough time left in the particular period to begin another assignment. That student can have free time, but it must be something they can do quietly at their desk, or even some other place in the classroom, where they won't disturb the other students who may be still working on their assignments. Such quiet activities could be:

Working at the computer, if it is unoccupied.

Reading a library book

Looking at, or reading one of the school magazines

Listening to a cassette/read-along story.

Coloring or drawing.

Working with some manipulative materials.

The student is not allowed to just sit there and stare into space. They must do something, as long as it is non-disruptive to the other students. Surprisingly, other students don't seem to become upset when one or more students have free time and they may not. The other students know, sooner or later, (maybe later that day, tomorrow, or the next day) they too will be able to do something quietly. So don't feel you have to keep your students occupied every single moment of the day. Once you have trained your students not to disrupt the others, they will be able to handle the free time given to them, especially if they realize this time can be lost if they don't abide by your one request. . . quietly. (And it is not an excessive amount.)

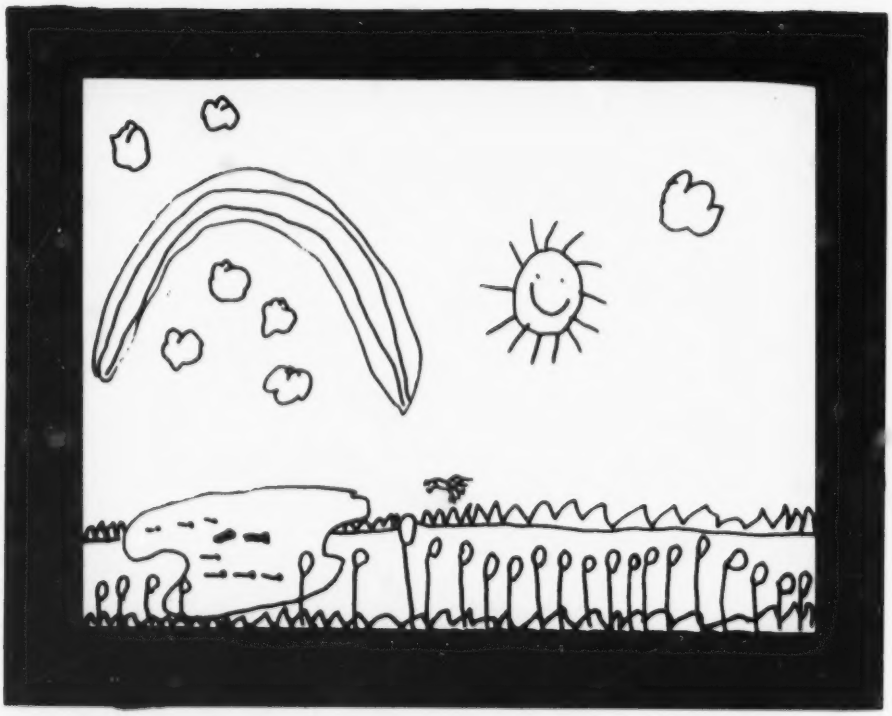
## Keeping Students on Task

"If you waste my time during reading, math, spelling, etc., I will waste your time during recess..."

This one simple rule has worked very well for me over the years. I have had many students learn this rule the hard way, others had only to see other students stay in and work during recess to abide by this rule.

During math time, I expect to see my students working or talking about math. When it is reading time, I expect my students to be working or talking about their reading assignment. etc. and not about the movie that was on TV last night, or what they plan to do after school. If I look around and see a student off-task, and look up again later and see that student off-task, that student will not be called to recess, or will not be called to go home for the day. Instead, that particular student will spend their recess time working in whatever subject they were caught not being on-task.

Initially, I may remind a student to get busy, or to settle down and get to work. In most instances this may be enough to keep the student on task. But I try to keep my verbal directives to a minimum, and I don't like repeating myself to my students. This is another technique of getting the students to monitor themselves, as I mentioned under scheduling the day/week. When I initiate this policy in the beginning of the school year, I find it will works quite effectively.I don't need to make a big deal about it; I just mention this rule. When a student violates this, I calmly tell the student at recess time that they will have to work in their math, spelling, reading, etc. as they wasted too much of your time. That student may be quite upset with you momentarily, but it will be one of the last times he/she will think about not attending to his/her work.



## Discipline

Disciplinary problems are, I feel, closely tied with keeping students on task. Generally speaking, I have never had what I would say was a serious problem with, or concern regarding disciplining of students. If you keep your students on task, they don't have a whole lot of time to get into mischief.

Also, giving your students excessive amounts of free time can also lead to disciplinary problems with some students, as they just may not be able to handle all that free time. I always try to assign my students enough work to keep them on task for most of the period to avoid having a student with forty-five minutes of free time in a sixty minute class period.

Recently our school district implemented in all its schools a student handbook outlining very specifically what is expected of each student attending a school in our district; from attendance, tardiness, behavior, student rights and responsibilities, etc. Each student is given a copy of this handbook at the beginning of the school year for their review and for their parent's review, so they know up front what will be expected of them.

I never have and never will believe in the students making up the classroom rules. You are the teacher, you are responsible for their education and their social behavior while attending your school, or classroom. So you make the rules, and it is up to the students to be willing to accept the consequences of following the rules you set, that are outlined in the student handbook.

As I mentioned before, you will find that in such a school setting, you and your students will become more like a "school family, than just a teacher and his/her students."

## Volunteers

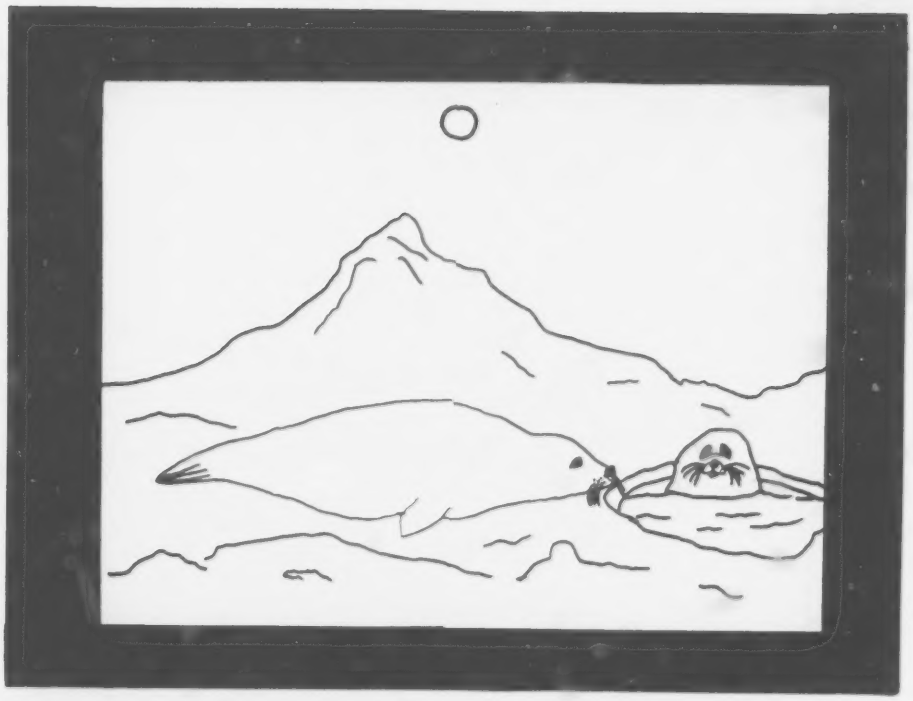
Here in Egegik, I have had the luxury of a few people in the community who have volunteered their time to work with the students on occasion. One man, who has artistic talent, works with the students once a week for about an hour on various art techniques in drawing, shading, and painting. The students have picked up some art skills from this man that I wasn't able to provide, because I don't have a strong background or personal interest in art.

A young woman has volunteered to work a few afternoons each week with one of our students who is having difficulties in most subject areas. This student has made noticeable progress since she began giving him the one-to-one intensive attention he needs that I am not always able to provide.

Once in awhile, my local school committee president comes in and teaches an art lesson with the students, as a change of pace for both the students and me.

So, to summarize how to teach a wide variety of grades, ability levels, and subjects:

- Stick to a regular and consistent daily/weekly schedule to allow your students to monitor themselves in switching over to the next subject or lesson.
- Vary your schedule, as you feel is necessary, to accommodate the special occasions and holidays, student interests, and your interests.
- Most of the students will be taught, and will progress on an individualized basis, at their own pace or speed.
- Group your students according to their ability level, rather than according to their grade level.
- Find out each student's strengths and weaknesses before placing them in their textbooks. This can be easily done with quick informal assessments on your part.
- Make sure you have available in your school or classroom a wide variety of supplementary materials. This will allow you to have some of your students working independently on instructional assignments, so you can devote quality and direct instruction time to the rest of your students.
- Using older students as tutors and helpers with some of your younger and less capable students, is a natural occurrence in this type of school setting. Don't hesitate to use it.
- Make allowances for students to have free time to pursue other interests, as long as they don't disrupt the rest of the class.
- Train your students to monitor themselves, to keep on task, with the understanding that if they waste your valuable teaching time, you will waste their valuable recess time.
- Keeping students on task will do more for you than any other technique, in keeping discipline problems at a minimum. It is important that you make the class rules, as only you should be the one to enforce them. Having a student handbook available for all students is also a positive approach in outlining rules and expectations for which your students will be held accountable.
- Welcome and encourage those individuals in your community who wish to volunteer their time, services, and expertise to work with the students, that you and your local school committee feel would be of benefit to the students, particularly if it is in an area you are not as qualified to teach.



# *Part Four*

# *Other Topics of Concern*

I want to mention the following topics of concern that you, as a teacher in rural Alaska, might also want to be aware of.

Personal items to bring with you

It was brought to my attention that this is one area that a lot of first-time teachers to rural Alaska have questions and concerns about—that they just didn't know, or were not told what kinds of personal items to bring with them when they received their first teaching assignment.

So, let me try to give you a basic needs list you might want to consider and keep in mind:

- **Clothing**

  The type of winter clothing you will need will vary depending upon which part of the state you will be living and working in. For example, in Southeast Alaska, you will want to invest in good quality rain gear as this section of the state receives about eighty (80) or more inches of rain per year. The winter temperatures usually do not drop below zero for any long periods of time.

  In other parts of the state, good quality goose-down clothing (coats, snowpants, gloves, face protectors, etc.) are necessary. Again, the winter temperature extremes (and the summer temperature extremes as well) vary within the state, so you will need to ask the District you are considering working for, what types of winter clothing you will need.

  Basically, dressing in layers is the most recommended method as you can add to, or shed the clothing as the conditions dictate. Thermal underwear is good if you are going to be outdoors for long periods of time, but not very practical for itinerant teachers who may be comfortable wearing them while traveling to their schools, but once inside the school, they will be too hot. So, dress in layers, with goose-down coats, wool, flannel, and/or corduroy type of material. In some sections of the state, you will need the heavier insulated down coats, while in other parts of the state a lighter quality down coat will suffice. Be sure to ask about the weather conditions and temperature extremes where you will be living and working.

- **Sleeping Bag**

  You will need this as you may have to travel for overnight meetings, workshops, in-service meetings, or with some of your students on school trips, and you may have to sleep in

the school gym or school building. Also, you may have unexpected guests or visitors who need this.

- **Footwear**
  Again, this will vary according to the section of the state you will be living and working. Felt-lined boots (where the lining can be taken out of the boot to be dried if it becomes damp) are very popular for outdoor use. In some sections of the state, where the winter temperatures get down to -40° or so, the Army surplus bunny boots (with air pumped into them) are used.
- **A good quality knife and sharpener.**
- **A small meat saw.**
- **Bedding.**
  This is not provided by the District for district housing, nor for village housing. You will need to be sure to provide this (i.e., sheets, blankets, pillowcases, spreads, and in some instances, even pillows).
- **Personal toiletry articles.**
- **Cooking and Kitchen Utensils**
  You may have to supply these yourself, especially if you have to rent village housing. Sometimes, even District housing may not have everything you need. (Be sure to ask about this, and perhaps even have these items all packed and ready to ship up in case you should need them).
- **Medication**
  If you are re taking prescribed medication, be sure to bring along enough to last for several months at a time. Also, stock up on all the basics of cough medicines, aspirins, etc. so you will have them readily available. (Some villages may not have a store, or may not have what you prefer.)

## Non-teaching Spouses

If you secure a teaching position in rural Alaska and your spouse is a non-teacher or does not secure a teaching position, you may want to take the time to talk this situation over with each other before making the final decision to come up to your site.

You as the teacher, will have more than enough to keep you busy and your time occupied. You will want to be careful and concerned that your spouse will also have enough to do during the day to keep him/her busy and fulfilled. Some of the rural villages are more isolated than others. Some villages have more of a community spirit to them—they may have a regular schedule of events and activities planned for the community residents such as evening activities at the school, adult sports activities, church

activities, monthly potlucks, movies, etc. Other villages may not have such an active group or social gatherings. So, it is important that you consider your spouse's concerns and well being when accepting a teaching position in rural Alaska.

I've known many teachers who have come and gone because their spouses did not like the setting, or lacked enough activities and challenges to keep them active and satisfied. Other teachers I have known have come up to teach alone, leaving their spouses and/or families behind for a period of time just to be on the safe side, then brought them up later in the school year, or the next school year.

### Cabin Fever

It took me several years before I experienced what is commonly referred to as "cabin fever." This is the "depressed",

"burnt out", or "I don't give a damn anymore...", "...this is definitely my last year teaching out here...", "I can't wait to get back to civilization..." feeling that usually seeps in around mid-February during the dark days of winter. I suppose it is worse if you are single or alone, but it could happen to married couples as well.

At times, this feeling can last for days at a time, but it eventually passes. Here are some suggestions on how to get through this depressing period of time if it should ever infect you:

- Telephone someone you are close to; a girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse, parent, children, grandparent, other school employee, and just talk, talk, talk...about anything and everything.
- Cook up a storm (if you are a decent cook) and pig out or bring the food around to community members if you don't want to consume all the food yourself.
- Go visiting around the community.
- Invite some friends for an evening of company, card games, etc.
- Take a more active interest in your hobbies or other personal interests, or attempt a new hobby.
- Try exercising or do more of it if you already exercise regularly.
- If you can't shake the feeling, take some personal leave time and just relax. If you are not too isolated, get out of the village for a few days.

### Non-District Personnel Staying at the School

Although this is not as common as it once was, there are times when someone (or several) comes into the village to perform some work or service for the village, or the state, and does not have a place to stay. The school usually ends up taking in such people, even though they are not

connected with the school district in any way. This can be somewhat irritating to the teacher at times, especially if they arrive unannounced. But, as I said, this doesn't occur as often as in the past.

However, there may still be some small, relatively isolated villages that just do not have any community facilities that can accommodate itinerant workers. Even though I am not the best cook around, I try to put myself in that individual's place– if I were a stranger coming into a small community for a couple of days of work, I would be grateful to someone taking the time to allow me a place to stay and providing a cooked meal and a comfortable place to sleep.

### Groceries

You might want to ship up or bring along with you a small box of basic food stuffs to get you by the first day or two (or longer if you find out that the village doesn't have a store, or the store is across or down the river). Most villages will have a store of some kind where you can get your basic supplies.

For your long-term needs, you will want to consider ordering your food out of the larger cities. You can have these mailed out to you via parcel post. It is usually less expensive in the long run, especially if you order case lot items. But, you can also order half-case lots or even individual items if you wish. Some villages in our District can get their supplies shipped up from Seattle on barges that come into their community on a regular basis. This method is very cost effective, but you may have to order full case lots. However, you can combine your order with another member of the community and share those items that you don't wish to have full cases of. You will want to be sure to check with your employer for this information, so you can plan ahead a bit.

# Part Five

# Possible Questions to Ask Prospective Employing School Districts in Rural Alaska

One thing you should do when interviewing with a rural school district is to ask as many questions as possible about the District, the position you are applying for, the village you may be living and working in, and the village school set up.

Don't be afraid to bring up any types of questions or concerns you may have, no matter how silly they may appear to you or to your prospective employer. Ask that the District's representatives be thorough, honest and, if necessary, blunt and to the point regarding your questions. The more you know about your possible teaching assignment, the better prepared you will be when you get there—or it may turn out that this assignment or position is not be suitable for you—and you could decline the offer and possibly save yourself and the District any unnecessary problems during the coming school year.

Besides some of the more standard questions you will ask (which I won't list here), you might want to keep some of the following in mind:

**The District in General:**

- What is the size of the school district? (in miles)
- How many villages comprise the district?
- Are all the villages in the district isolated from each other or can a person travel overland, by water, or connecting road to neighboring villages without any major difficulties?
- What is the student population of the entire district?
- What is the student population of the village school you may be living and working in?
- How many teachers/administrators are in the district?
- How many teachers/administrators are in the village school where you may be living and working?

**Weather Conditions**

- What is the weather like where you may be living and working? (i.e., average winter temperatures, possible extreme temperatures, snowfall; how much, rain, wind).

**Air Travel within the District**

- Can you get to your village by large commercial jet, or is it accessible only by smaller commercial aircraft?

- Is the air travel in the area relatively safe, or do the frequent storms and inclement weather conditions make air travel in this part of the state a bit more risky than in other areas?

  (The reason I put these two questions in here is because there may be some prospective teachers out there who simply may not feel comfortable flying in small aircraft and/or flying in windy, stormy conditions –which may occur on occasion. There are many other rural villages in the state which are accessible by the larger commercial jets. This may be more suitable for you.)

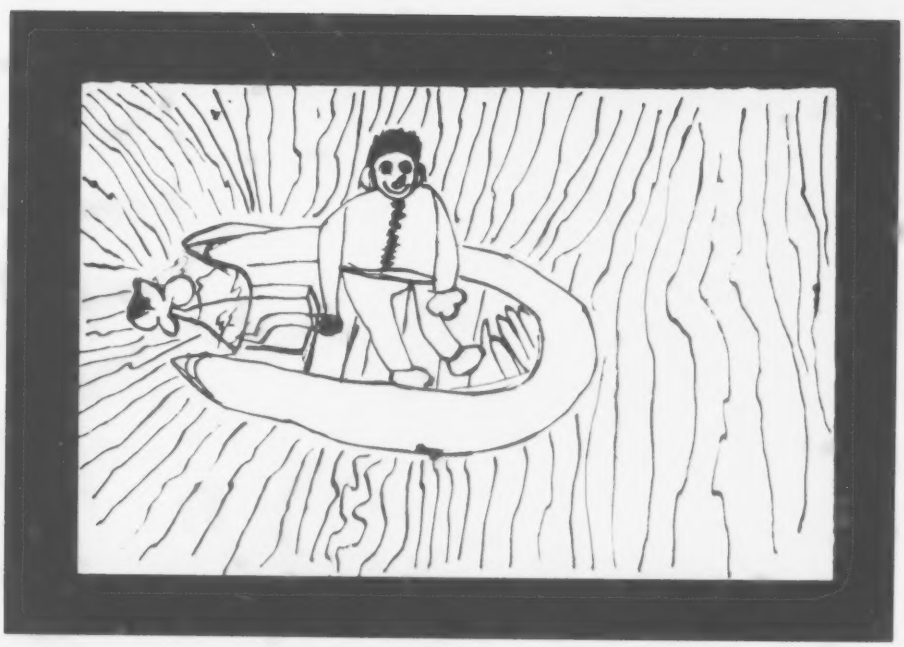
### Other Questions

- Is there a store in the village where you can get basic supplies? (Don't assume there is.)
- Is there a post office in the village? (The same with this question.)
- Where can you order bulk groceries and supplies from? (What is the nearest major city or town you could order these from– Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, etc. Ask for the names and addresses of some of these grocery stores.)
- Is there a regular barge line service to the village, in order to get supplies?
- Can you can ship/mail boxes to the village school prior to your arrival?
- Ask for the phone number of the village post office, when you secure a teaching position, so you can call ahead and let the postmaster know that you may be mailing boxes up ahead of you, and if he/she wouldn't mind holding them for you?
- Does the District provide teacher housing or do you have to secure your own housing in the village?

  Regarding village housing, don't expect to rent the type of home you will be leaving behind. Generally speaking, the homes in the rural areas of the state are small, yet functional. The inside of the homes receive more attention and care than the outside. Availability of village housing for teachers varies from village to village, but you should expect to rent a home that is clean, warm, and dry.

- Ask about the village and its residents. Ask about the ethnic makeup of the residents.
- Is the village a traditional Native village with strong ties to their cultural ways? (i.e., native language dominant, or still somewhat active; subsistence way of life, cash economy, or a mixture of the two?)

- Who are the most influential and/or powerful people in the village?
- Ask about the students in the village school you are considering teaching. Chances are the individual interviewing you will have some idea of the students' ages, grade spans, personalities, and ability levels.
- Ask about the salary schedule and other benefits the District provides its staff.



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# Part Six

## Advantages/Disadvantages to Teaching in a One-Teacher School

As you know, every teaching situation has its advantages and disadvantages. A one-teacher school can be an ideal school setting for the right type of teacher. I have listed some of each, according to how I view them:

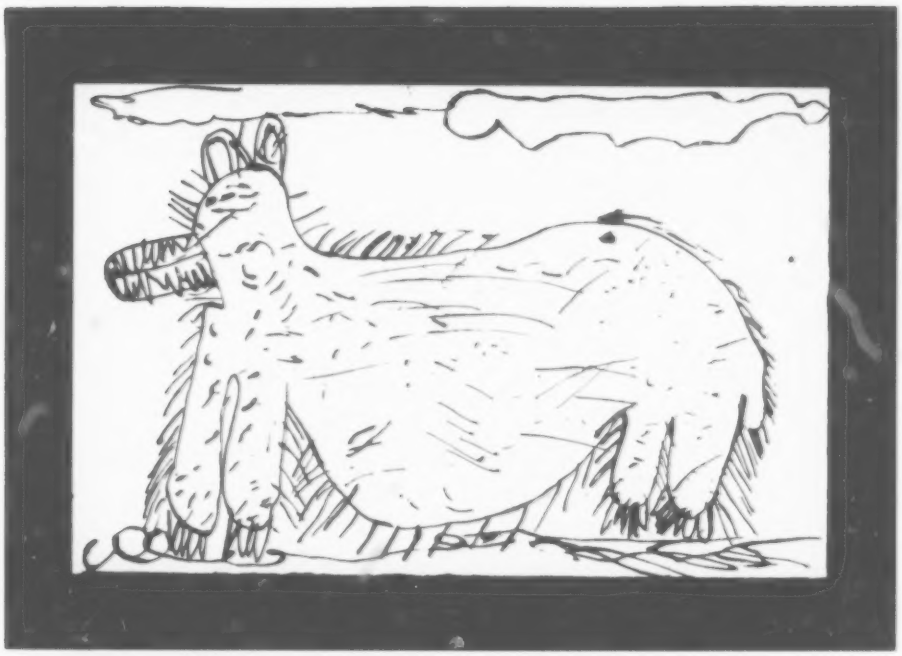
| | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | More freedom to make choices/decisions regarding the school routine. | No other staff or faculty members to rely on for assistance. |
| 2. | No direct daily supervision from administration. (Sorry, guys!!??) | Having to teach all grade levels, and all subject areas. |
| 3. | Teacher becomes very close to most students and parents. | Perhaps a higher level of stress placed upon self to succeed. |
| 4. | You do not have to be concerned about matching of faculty staff, (i.e. personalities, strengths, weaknesses, etc.) | Have to take all of the responsibility for those students who do not make satisfactory progress. |
| 5. | You do not have to be concerned about staff conflicts, and/or one teacher notpulling his/her weight. | You cannot afford to be sick, or take too many personal leave days, as you may be the only certified teacher in the village. (You can use non-certified subs). |
| 6. | You can take all, or most of the credit and self-satisfaction for students' progress. | You are essentially on call 24 hours per day/7 days per week, for nine months of the year. |
| 7. | Living in the school apartment. (Depending on your point of view.) | Living in the school apartment. (Depending on your point of view.) |
| 8. | Seeing a child develop over the years and knowing you played a big part in that development. | You must perform all duties of the school routine (i.e. administrative, teacher, community relations.) |
| 9. | Appreciation of your efforts and commitment by the community. | Possible early teacher burnout. (i.e. developing feelings of inadequacy, not worth all your time and effort.) |
| 10. | | Difficulty accepting the fact that you are not 100% competent in all aspects of the curriculum. |

Please don't be alarmed that I have listed more disadvantages than advantages. You have to weigh them against each other. I personally believe that a small rural one-teacher school is not for every teacher, any more than teaching in a large school system is not for every teacher.

I hope after reading this you have come away with a clearer picture of what it is like (or what it could be like) teaching and living in this type of setting.

For those of you considering teaching in Rural Alaska, I hope this has given you some useful information to help you make your final decision.

Good luck in your search for a teaching position.



# Artists' Credits

| Artist | Grade | School | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| Caleb Walser | 5th | Chiniak Elementary School | 6 |
| Uriah Strong | 7th | Tenakee School | 12 |
| Jessica West | 1st | David Louis Memorial School | 15 |
| Amber Bird | 4th | Badger Road Elementary School | 28 |
| Allen Mwarey | 1st | David Louis Memorial School | 35 |
| Verdel Drashner | 1st | Cantwell School | 38 |
| Allen Mwarey | 1st | David Louis Memorial School | 44 |
| Justin Burgess | 5th | Badger Road Elementary School | 50 |
| David Deacon | K | David Louis Memorial School | 56 |
| Kwang | 3rd | North Star Elementary School | 62 |
| Arron Evanon | 4th | Badger Road Elementary School | 68 |
| Deja Barrier | K | S. E. Island Correspondence Study | 75 |
| Allen Mwarey | 1st | David Louis Memorial School | 85 |
| Craig Howard | 1st | David Louis Memorial School | 87 |